The Life of James Elroy Flecker

from Letters and Materials provided by his Mother

By Geraldine Hodgson, D.Litt.

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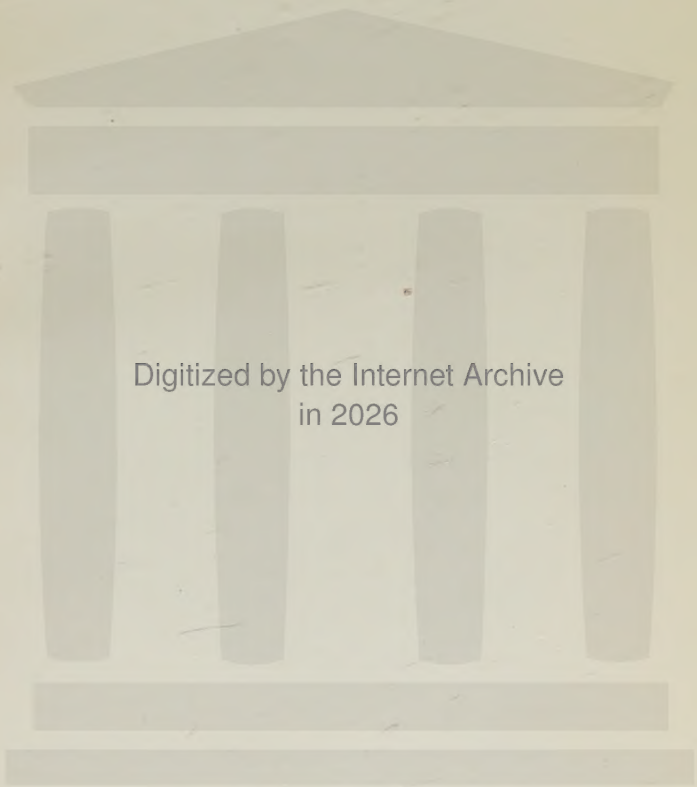
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FLECKER IN 1912, OUTSIDE HIS HOUSE IN THE LEBANON.

[*Frontispiece.*

THE LIFE OF JAMES ELROY FLECKER

FROM LETTERS AND MATERIALS PROVIDED BY HIS MOTHER

BY

GERALDINE HODGSON, LITT.D.

OXFORD

BASIL BLACKWELL

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For thee, *O Architect of Dream!*

AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is impossible here to thank everyone who has assisted with materials for this book. I believe that recognition of their kindness will be found in the text, save in the following instances, arising lately. Therefore, here, I gratefully record assistance received through and from M. Robert de la Vaissière and MM. G. Crès et Cie.; and also I offer my sincere thanks to M. A. Vallette and to *La Société du Mercure de France* for their generous permission to me to quote a poem of M. Tristan Klingsor intact; also to Mr. Beazley for allowing publication of part of a letter, and to Mr. Frank Savery for a similar permission, as also for further information, which if not actually reproduced here, has been of help.

GERALDINE HODGSON.

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FOREWORD

Some account of the genesis of this book seems desirable and even necessary.

The Poet's Mother, most fortunately, kept, from the time when he went to Uppingham and onwards, the greater part of the letters and postcards he wrote home. After his death, she went through these with great care, selecting from them those she judged to be most suitable; and from this selection the letters in this book, either intact or in part, have been taken.

After Flecker's death she collected, with persevering devotion, from some of his friends who had survived the war, such information and recollections as they could give.

In 1923, she entrusted these materials to me, at the same time giving me much verbal information, counsel, and suggestion. The book, then, is based on all these materials, supplemented by my own knowledge of his published poetry, drama, and prose.

This account does not adequately represent the time and care which his Mother, for nearly ten years, has given to the work: these must be imagined, since there are activities and energies of love for which human language is no sufficient vehicle.

For the matter and form of the Epilogue I alone am responsible.

G. H.

December 1924.

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE

James Elroy Flecker's paternal grandfather who was, as it is interesting, in the light of the Poet's later life, to record, for a short time a schoolmaster in Constantinople, and who was, in later life, a Baptist Minister in England, married a lady of Huguenot descent, Elizabeth Pardon. Her father was, at one time, a valued " reader " for the firm of Bagster.

The Poet's maternal grandfather was a learned Hebrew scholar so profoundly read in the Talmud and so erudite that his advice was sought, informally, by one of the revisers of the English Translation of the Bible, when the New Version was made in 1884. Elizabeth Pardon was a deeply religious woman, a diligent student of the Bible, a woman of kindly humour, widely beloved. She was remarkable for her interest in the right and discriminating use of language. This care for fine and apt diction, this desire to express thought in the most felicitous words was characteristic of the Pardon family, but of none more markedly than of her; so, if such qualities can be transmitted, it would seem probable that from her Flecker inherited that taste for the most fit word which marked his work from the very first, and never left him throughout life. This appears to be all the more likely as the Poet's father, Elizabeth Pardon's son, has always had a similar sense of right language.

W. H. Flecker, Elizabeth Pardon's son, at a very early age married the daughter of the Talmud scholar already mentioned. She was a student of the Royal Academy of Music and had gained distinction as a singer and a pianist. It was love of music which first drew them together.

At the time of the marriage, W. H. Flecker was Vice-

Master of New College, Eastbourne, a school whose headmaster was F. Schreiner, brother of the well-known authoress. In 1883, he took Holy Orders in the Church of England, being licensed to a Sunday curacy. In the following year he was appointed the first headmaster of the newly established City of London College School. In August of 1884, he and his wife moved to Lewisham, where Mr. Flecker acted as Sunday preacher at Lee. There, on Nov. 5th, 1884, in Gilmore Road, Lewisham, on a gloomy and foggy day, one of the worst and foggiest which even London can produce, the future Poet was born.

He had the appearance of a child of two months, with well-developed and already expressive features. His blue-grey eyes, his sudden movements, and more than all his masses of long black hair gave him an elf-like look, which should, perhaps, have suggested the unusual gifts of this boy.

After his father, he was christened Herman, which happened to be the name of an old family friend. Elroy was added in deference to his mother, who wished that each of her children should possess one Biblical name.[1] Years after, when he was at Oxford, Roy, as he was always called at home, took a dislike to what he called his foreign sounding names, and discarded Herman for James. Though no one at the time seems to have remarked it, inquiry has proved that he certainly showed, while he was quite young, characteristics which indicated intelligence far above the average and tastes not easily to be gainsaid. At times, he manifested an obstinacy, and that not seldom over unimportant and quite unpredictable things, which neither coaxing nor punishment could overcome. With intensely alert powers of observation, and general sensitiveness to externals, went a nervousness which rendered him liable to all kinds of fears, and a passionate temper, which brought not a few difficulties, and which sometimes, especially at night,

[1] Cf. *Genesis* xvi, 13.

culminated in outbursts of almost uncontrollable screaming.

Considering his delight, when he was older, in water, whether sea, lake, or river, his youthful terror and hatred of it, and more particularly of the sea, is remarkable. It appeared before he was a year old, during a holiday at Sandown: he screamed till he was taken out of sight and sound of the sea. When he was about five, efforts were made to help him overcome this. The remedy was drastic, and at first little less than torture to him, but he was made to learn to swim. Eventually he became expert, and took tremendous pleasure in bathing. Indeed, with life's accustomed irony, it fell out that it was a plunge into the Black Sea, after a long and very hot coast ride from Constantinople, which gave him a chill, developing first into pneumonia, and thus preparing the way for the illness which in the end killed him at Davos.

From first to last, his was a nature in which contradictory elements struggled for supremacy. A curious taste showed itself early; he would not, patiently, be carried or wheeled, except with his whole person turned towards the direction in which he was going. This, when, at the age of five, he was at Bournemouth for a holiday, collided with his horror of water. He was playing by a stream, when he saw something he liked on the other side. His passion for going straight ahead overruled his hatred of water, and without a thought or pause, he walked, clothes and all, through the stream to get what he wanted.

In May, 1886, Dean Close School at Cheltenham having just been founded, Roy's father was appointed the first headmaster. The school, a mile and a half from the centre of the town, was, so far as England was concerned, Roy's home for the rest of his life.

As his early education was quite informal, he learned to read in a fashion then unknown to the schools. His mother was accustomed to go daily into Cheltenham

in a pony carriage for shopping. Roy accompanied her everywhere, and insisted on being told the names and signs over every shop or other place where they stopped. Thus, quite unawares, he learned to read. Playing with picture books supplemented his knowledge, and beyond these two easy means he needed no "reading lessons." Henceforward, reading was to him one of life's main joys.

Another favourite occupation, shared, as all he did was, with his mother, was building with Richter's stone architectural bricks. Eventually, as birthdays and Christmas days increased his collection, he had a great store of these, and he and his mother, specially on Sunday afternoons, built according to the model plans supplied. Some were really complicated, even including tiled floors within. The greater the nicety of design, the more delighted was his natural taste for artistic excellence; and the bricks, lending themselves to almost endless elaboration of design, continued to be a pleasure even when he was quite a big boy.

The first trial in his life was the birth of his elder sister, at Christmas 1887. Roy's love for his mother amounted to a passion; moreover, being the first child, he had hitherto had all her attention. This was not only now necessarily divided, but was more than halved, because the little girl was delicate. What he suffered in being deprived not only of what in a dim childish way he felt was his right, but which was also the principal joy of his life, can only be pictured by active imaginations.

Physically, he was a sturdy child: but like many largely built mortals had little resisting power; he was the prey of every zymotic disease he encountered. In 1889, he had diphtheria. Acting under medical advice, his mother did not, on account of his sister's delicacy, nurse him, nor see him. Antitoxin was unavailable: his life was endangered. In this plight, though care was lavished on him by his grandmother and nurse, his misery, without his mother, was extreme. He recovered,

but his exasperation remained. One day he flung his dinner, plate and all, across the nursery. When he was quite restored to health, a legacy of irritable impatience with his sister remained. This was further increased by her delicacy, which could not stand the racket he delighted to make in the nursery, and which, therefore, his nurse was compelled to check. The friction constantly broke into open quarrels. One of these Roy ended with the pungent taunt, "A nice aunt you will make for my children"; a story fortunately preserved by his one unmarried aunt, to whom, in an Oxford letter (Nov., 1904), Roy referred as "Aunt D. Ltd." To his married aunts' names he appended "& Co." When these struggles became unmanageable, Roy was sent about the age of six to school; first to the kindergarten department of the Ladies' College. There he was *facile princeps;* and his mother, fearing that he would get accustomed to praise, sent him to a preparatory school. Though these explicable nursery difficulties arose, it must be remembered that Roy's affection was as strong as his hot temper; so that the children's life was one of happiness, diversified by storms.

His was a complex temperament, the natural dowry of all genuine artists, who are called upon to live in two worlds; that daily world with its scale of values ordered by and adapted to the larger portion of mankind, who call themselves practical, and endeavour to fix life's norm; and that other world, with its singular and wholly different standards of beauty and use. Not the least perplexing of his contradictions was an abiding if curious patience, half concealed by a quite apparent surface irritability. This, reinforced by his artistic sense of relative importance, led to endurance of some things which his elders might find trying; and to desperate vexation with what they felt to be trifles. Thus, when he was eleven, a slight operation on his throat was decided upon. While his parents rather anxiously awaited the surgeon's arrival, Roy was shouting with laughter over a

book he had chanced to take up. In his last illness, too, this

" Grace of long patience in days of adversity "

helped him to bear, with conspicuous courage, fatal illness, in a foreign country, surrounded by a world distracted over the first stages of the Great War.

Perhaps the dearest spot of his early years, one whose memory never passed, was the nursery where he and his sisters and brother grew up, and which in later years, until he left England, became his study. It was, indeed, a charming room, large, airy, bright. It faced south, and its windows, taking up the whole side, looked out across the rose-garden he loved so well, to a pleasant country ; to delicate lines of lightly wooded undulations, bounded at last by the Cotswolds. They made a background of perpetually shifting colour, with Leckhampton Hill shining in the sunlight, or veiled in mist, or suddenly blotted out by an on-sweeping storm-cloud. To the right of the rose-garden stood and still stand the " elms " of *November Eves*, one of the last four poems printed, posthumously, in *The Old Ships* :—

November Evenings ! Damp and still
They used to cloak Leckhampton hill,
. . . . . .
And send queer winds like Harlequins
That seized our elms for violins
And struck a note so sharp and low
Even a child could feel the woe.

The nursery walls were covered from floor to ceiling with bright pictures, often from *Pears* and similar "Annuals" ; Desdemona, Portia, Runaway-Matches, stage-coaching episodes, and so forth. In his last illness, at Davos, the memory of that room came back to him so vividly that he tried to reproduce it, as nearly as he could, in his sick-room. His longing for home, during all the years he was abroad, was a consuming passion. It broke out when he was writing *Brumana*—

Oh shall I never never be home again ?

and in his Swiss room, where he had tried to reproduce Dean Close nursery, it inspired *November Eves*.

A nursery, however, is nothing without a nurse, and Flecker, like Robert Louis Stevenson, has immortalised his :—

We crept about like mice, while Nurse
Sat mending, solemn as a hearse.

This, of course, is a whimsical memory of her efforts to keep him quiet for the sake of his delicate sister. That he was at times "difficult" this still-remembered episode delightfully shows. The children had a pet parrot domiciled in the nursery. They loved it, though even for a parrot its voice was raucous and persistent. One day, Mrs. Flecker found the parrot and its cage in the kitchen. She asked why. Nurse Johnson replied with brevity and some feeling : "Master Roy I must stand : the parrot I needn't."

Roy's dramatic ability showed early, and stage-plays of a sort abounded in the nursery. On one occasion shrieks of mingled fear and temper issued from the room. Roy was discovered holding up his sisters' adored rag-doll, on which he was about to perform the Judgment of Solomon, while they unwillingly filled, in rather unorthodox fashion, the rôles of the quarrelling mothers.

An intense and characteristic taste of his later life was early called out, and perhaps cultivated, by the railway line which runs along at the end of the road past Dean Close School. When Roy was a boy a signal-box, since removed, stood just at the end of the road. The whole thing was a source of endless delight to him. He was accustomed to exchange greetings with the signalman, and once, for a few rapturous moments, he was allowed to mount one of the Midland engines which have running powers over the Great Western lines. As a rule he went alone to watch the trains. He liked best the main-line expresses, because he found their sudden disappearance under the short bridge at Lansdown Road, specially exciting. But there was also one evening train he

particularly liked, and usually some of the Dean Close boys went with him to watch for it. When it came, he shouted a greeting, watched it rattle away under the bridge, and then, when he had heard the signals changed, he would turn, quite unbidden, and walk, a quiet, unforgettable little figure, across the field towards home and bed. Best of all, Dr. Flecker, sometimes, had leisure to take him on to the bridge, on dark winter afternoons, there to watch the multitude of changing lights on the unseen signal posts, astonishing bits of colour unaccountably starring the sombre evening gloom. Perhaps not everyone is attracted by railway signals, and some are insignificant enough. It is otherwise in the west. Whether the magnitude of the Great Western's complicated responsibilities is accountable, or the soft blurring western atmosphere is specially favourable, there are many points on this line, where at night the green, red, and brilliantly white lights make an entrancing picture, suggesting some fairy-land hidden in the darkness, flashing out here and there in these jewels of light, beckoning to some enchanted and withdrawn place.

It is natural enough, of course, that like many boys, he decided early in life to be an engine-driver. A little later, without any explanation, he announced his intention to be a missionary. Though he silently let both these careers slip by him, the fascination of the signals' colour-scheme lasted: this boyish taste for the railway lights was but the first page of an endlessly unfolding dream.

His father was Roy's chosen companion in boyhood for long walks and talks. To him he confided his ambitions, as they talked over work and plans. Together they explored the Cotswold country, and Roy learned the ways of wild things as, for instance, they startled a blackbird off its nest, and let it draw them on and on as it decoyed them from its nest. It was Roy who discovered the peculiar charm of Painswick Beacon, with the great view thence to the Severn Bridge. It became the boy's favourite picnic place, even in January, though it might

involve carrying coal as well as food to make tea in the disused quarry.

An early letter which he, being seven, received from his father, chances to have been saved. It shows the atmosphere surrounding him :—

"Castle Hotel, Brecon,
Sunday (1892).

My dear Roy,

I have just come home from Church : and I expect you have been to Church also with dear mother and Claire. But what different churches there are ! This one at Brecon is a splendid large building, a Priory, like Christ Church, six hundred years old, with beautiful windows. I much enjoyed attending service there, but often thought of all my dear ones away in the south.

You asked me to tell you 'all about the mountains,' but that would be a long business. All this country is made up of river valleys, the valleys are narrow and the hills very high : so the country is beautiful. The streams are swift, some of them rushing down to join the Usk, others into the Wye, and both these are fine big rivers.

One day we walked to Abergavenny and rode home by rail. The distance by rail is thirty-eight miles and we took four hours over it. If you look at the railway map of South Wales, you will see a lot of lines running close together from north to south.[1]

All these run down by the stream-sides, and each valley or glen is full of ironworks. They bring the iron-ore from all parts of Spain mainly, and smelt it here. The fires from the pits light up all the sky. But we see none of that at Brecon, it is all further south.

The Brecon Beacons, up which we are going this afternoon, are nearly 3,000 feet high, so we shall have a good climb. I want you to be a very good dear boy, and to cheer up mother. I am always rather miserable without her and I expect she is without me, so you must love her very much.

Now good-bye darling boy : kiss your two sisters for me.

Your loving daddy."

When he left the preparatory school, which saved him from the walk to and fro with his sister and nurse which he had resented as a great indignity, he entered Dean Close School. He was reading everything he could seize upon, and was in danger of going ahead too fast. At eight years old, he had begun Greek, but his father

[1] Here was a diagram.

became anxious about his progress, and superintended his work himself. He entered Dean Close in 1893.

Reading aloud in the family circle was an established custom until the children had grown up and left home. Though Dr. Flecker occasionally found time to come in, the reader was invariably Mrs. Flecker. Thus, by a very early age, Roy had listened to large parts of Dickens, Longfellow, and Tennyson, and to much of Thackeray, George Eliot, Carlyle, and Browning. The children were expected to employ their fingers; Roy was induced to try to knit, till his evident loathing of it won him exemption. With musical parents, the children naturally had plenty of music; action songs in the nursery came first, and were followed soon by chamber music in the drawing-room. Their mother chose oratorio choruses, and arranged them simply in parts, so that each child could contribute something. Roy could play both piano and violin, but neither well, as, in common with all forms of dullness, he disliked practising. To this simple chamber music, he vastly preferred a violin solo by himself to his mother's accompaniment.

When the children and their cousins acted plays Roy, in spite of his creative ability, proved an indifferent actor, though once, when constrained to play the Prince in Cinderella he achieved, through natural boredom and vexation, a success which was not histrionic.

His musical education very early showed his utter distaste for drudgery. In his case, at any rate, genius was not any form of "an infinite capacity for taking pains," so far as acquiring the elements of any subject whatever was concerned. When it came to "creative" work the whole scene changed: then no trouble, no effort, no pain of polishing was too great. But with acquisition of something already done by someone else, he could not or would not drudge. His attitude to music was quaintly described by one of his masters:—

"I remember so well his saying that semitones and minims were 'a waste of time': and he could never keep the time on his violin

in such a work as the Bach-Gounod *Meditation*. He liked music with plenty of movement in it, and was never tired of playing Hungarian Dances, etc. He loved to exaggerate the difference between the syncopated slow movement and the Friss or lively movement. He would warm up in the Friss movement which taxed him mechanically because he would not practise. His brain was always miles in front of his hands."

Another method of employing the children's wits was found in spontaneous verse-making during walks, when the parents supplied a subject. Oddly enough Roy's were seldom the best, even when on one occasion a small girl-cousin produced nothing more epoch-making than—

The goats shall go to hell below
The sheep to heaven above.

This rather odd inferiority can hardly be accounted for by the plea that the subjects were set, because Roy's fluent capacity for turning out verse on anything was marked at Oxford. The explanation probably is that a prodigy and a genius are seldom the same thing; he was far from being the most precocious of the children. His genius developed slowly and surely till it was prematurely cut off.

He was never, in the family circle, regarded as a genius; only as a boy of excellent intellectual quality. Indeed, every effort was made to cultivate his ability, and at Dean Close School his father always provided him with extra help in any subject when he seemed to be failing or lagging behind. As a small child, and as a man, he seemed to feel some temptation to draw his family's attention to his merits. When very young, he held up one of his own letters, saying "That is not a bad letter for a little boy." And with natural differences of expression he more than once in later years observed that he received recognition from outsiders not accorded to him at home.

Absence of mind may or may not be a mark of genius. In any case Roy was conspicuously absent-minded. He would put on a stocking and then sit meditating and oblivious for many minutes before he would remember

that stockings go in pairs. Similarly he would fold up his handkerchief and slip it into the ring, putting his napkin into his pocket.

In 1895 both a French and a German governess joined the family circle. Though, being in the school, Roy did not share his sisters' language lessons, he came into touch with these two teachers, and thus gained not only more knowledge than falls to many schoolboys, of French and German language and literature, but also of continental history and points of view.

Though intermittent attempts had begun much earlier he began more or less steadily to write verse from the age of twelve. The stimulus to this deliberate effort was competitions in *Chums*, which his mother, however, did not encourage. He persisted, however, and not unfrequently won their prizes with poems on postcards. It should be noted that he never won any prize for English verse at Dean Close, Uppingham, or Oxford. His own attitude to poetry is indicated by his custom, from schoolboy days, of copying his poems into small manuscript books with the utmost care. A few on sheets of notepaper he made into tiny books. But, as a rule, he preferred well-bound manuscript books: these were given a title and an index. One of these, which he sent to his mother from Uppingham, contains a dedication to her, which was probably, however, written at Cheltenham, when he was about fifteen and a half, just before he left Dean Close. This dedication may not be of great intrinsic value; and the same may be true of some other early poems of his boyhood, which are included here. But one main purpose of this book is to give, from the only source from which it can be obtained, a fair and reliable account of his life and work, specially as these were related to his home. Very seldom has a contemporary effort been made, in the case of our poets, to secure from oblivion, and in consequence from subsequent hypothesis, the actual facts and achievements of their lives from day to day. In order to save Flecker from

imaginary "lives" fifty years on, it may be better to print a few poems not in themselves great, but which do mark stages in his poetic development, and may, just because of that, interest those who come after, who can never have quite the opportunities which fall to a contemporary writer. This, then, is his earliest known "dedication" of a volume of poems :—

Come with me to the forest-glade,
And list to the lilt of a tune :
Come, but come in the evening shade,
In "the cold clear light of the moon."
Tho' the tune be too rough
For the Muses nine
And the melody all untrue
Yet strange to say
O Mother Mine
I offer the Tune to you.

It is in truth nothing wonderful : yet a curious and alert critic might find some satisfaction in comparing it with *Areiya*.

There remains in manuscript a fair quantity of this youthful verse, beginning with a semi-religious poem, *The Story of Christopher*. Of more merit than this are others, quite a noticeable proportion of the whole, tinged with religious conviction and feeling. One written in 1897, when, therefore, he was thirteen, without a title is a specimen of his early poetic form blended with a subdued religious strain :—

Rude Frost ! what brooks it that thy breath be chill ?
Wild Wind ! who fretteth for thy fury fierce ?
Rude Frost well-tended flowers ne'er may kill,
Wild Wind the cheery cottage ne'er may pierce.

. . . . . .

Let days of Joy, let days of Grief slip by,
Of old regrets muse not, nor coming care.
When trouble heavy on thy heart doth lie,
When thou art prospering forget not prayer.

Then on thy soul shall come the perfect peace
And midst thy toil a respite and a rest.
Joy shall be thine till weary work doth cease
And thou shalt reign above for ever blest.

In his childhood and early 'teens Roy, owing to his early training, and partly to his naturally religious nature, was convincedly Christian. In 1899 he went to a "Public School Camp" at Highcliffe, near Southbourne. He was fond of games, and had become a strong swimmer. He entered heartily into the camp life and recreations, thoroughly enjoying himself. He made many friends, and one of them wrote :—

"Roy was the life and soul of the party, witty and brilliant, and a real Christian of the Evangelical School. He knew the stern Puritan side of religion . . . and up to the age of seventeen would talk of Christianity with deep fervour."

These two boys, Roy not being quite fifteen, used to exchange their religious experiences. Once when they were discussing Darwinian Evolution Roy said, "Surely it makes it all the more wonderful that God should have revealed His love to the world in Christ"; a remark which suggests that his attitude was not merely borrowed and conventional, but had in it some personal interest and thoughtfulness.

In the following year the two boys met again in camp, this time at Fritton. Roy had changed very little, still uniting religious fervour and hearty enjoyment of daily life. This time it fell to him to help Mr. Locker Lampson edit the Camp Magazine, a tribute to his literary ability. Already some of his friends were noting this aspect of his many-faceted nature. For instance, his Cheltenham school-fellow, A. Iredale, afterwards an architect, notes in this boy of fifteen the beginnings of gifts so conspicuous later on :—

"Outstanding throughout these years was a strong artistic temperament, with a great love for the beautiful both in art and nature, and dominating all, an ever-growing attraction and feeling for all things appertaining to the East, with its pageantry of life and colour; an influence which manifested itself in his hobbies, carpentry for example, of which his work was oriental often in line and form, and which was to play a still greater part in the years to come."

His attitude to colour, and the changes it underwent,

is an interesting problem in any estimate of his poetry. In this connexion, a few lines from an unsuccessful "prize-poem" in *The Decanian*[1] have a permanent interest:—

Red rose the sun upon a troubled main:
With blood-red stain
He streaked the sullen billows far and wide,
And gorgeously he dyed
The sapphire robe of heaven with scarlet hue;
And o'er the surging sea, the petrel flew,
Emblem of rising restlessness and might,
Within the ocean breakers flaked with white.

Though the choice and use of "streaked" is prophetic here of its still more skilful use much later on in his life, these are not the colours which dye his mature work. The only modern French poet at all likely to have influenced him at this time is Leconte de Lisle, who had a taste for the primary colours, as, *e.g.*, in his *Panthère noire*. It is certain that Albert Samain, whose "agonie exquise de couleurs" Flecker appreciated highly later on in his life, was not known to him till many years after 1900: nor is this Samain's colour scheme at all. These verses appear, therefore, to show Flecker's first, natural, youthful taste for brilliancy, and in particular for scarlet, sapphire, and flashing white, which last, of course, is not a "colour." The Uppingham poems repeat these and add saffron. They are utterly different from the gold, silver, and blue and green of later days, and equally remote from the umbered shades and metallic glintings he handled so magically in his maturer years. One short poem, *The Shadow of a Dream*, shows the early birth of the fairy boat drifting down stream, which appears again in one form or another in later work. Like Shelley and other poets of alertly pictorial sense, some colours and images stayed persistently in his thoughts.

Again, his fantastic and even farcical vein which developed in some of his subsequent poems, and so markedly in *Hassan*, and in a few of his prose fantasias

[1] The Dean Close School Magazine.

can be detected in these boyish beginnings. They do not merit quotation, but they are worth mention as further evidence of the fact that Flecker was one and the same person all through his literary life. He never shuts his eyes or his mind to other men's work, whether good or bad: but his genius, while it developed, never changed abruptly, or broke off and began again.

When he was about fifteen, isolated with scarlet fever in the school sanatorium, he wrote two poems—*Flakes* and a *Ballad of Blue Carnations*—the latter a frenzied protest against the wall-paper which distracted his artistic sense sharpened by fever-tried nerves.

Flakes is a schoolboy jest, nothing more. The only justification for quoting a few verses is that for the first time Roy seemed to have learnt to handle his tools, so that he could now write verse after verse without bad metrical blunders:—

Make loud lament, ye Muses Nine,
Oh, turn ye ashy pale,
Your follower the rash has got,
Oh, willow, weep and wail.

No more his waking eyes will see
Leckhampton bathed in light,
No more he'll wake the prefect up
By snoring in the night.

No more he'll lose the wayward book,
And find it in a week:
No more with half-stuffed "spadgers"
His little den will reek.

No more he'll fret his patient brows
'Neath incandescent glow;
In puzzling out Demosthenes,
Expounding Cicero.

No more he'll sit and pore and groan
To find out which was first,
Pristis, Centaurus, Scylla and
Which was the one that burst.

Another poem, *The Solemne Tragedie of Miss Brown and Miss Smith*, relates the change of two friendly spinster

neighbours into sworn foes, because the "Tabby" of one slew the other's parrot. It again is boyish rollicking, but it deserves a niche in the story of the poet's development, not for the triviality of its contents, but, in its arrangement; for the foretaste of fantasy, which offered such a bewildering problem to some of those who had hoped to find in *Hassan* some consolation for the withdrawal of their old friend *Chu Chin Chow*. Roy divided this early "work" into *Sorrow the First; Extravaganza II.; Spasm the Third; Agony the Fourth; The Voices in the Garden; Squeak the Fifth;* and *Wail the Eighth*. The matter of the poem does not rise to the level of the titles. In the same category as these, there still exists one example of the rimed "advertisements," with which Roy often amused himself, not without a sidelong glance at the possibilities of newspaper competitions. His seemingly unpromising subject was Day and Martin's Blacking.

Perhaps these two, mere fragments, deserve to be rescued from his *Juvenilia:* the first rather for conception than form. In a poem on electricity he says that its force gives us—

winged words, faster than the wildest dream
Of old-time love could frame, warmed with the fire
Of separated passion.

The other lines have no title; they stand alone with the date 1902:—

The vision fades away
And the grey casement glimmer
Ushers the weary day.

The story of his schoolboy life is not altogether easy to tell. He did not "raise the devil" by a chemical experiment, as Shelley essayed to do at Eton, but neither was he the normal public schoolboy, supposing that such a thing exists. Throughout his school and college life he had a reputation for hating drudgery. He did hate it when it was of externally imposed kinds, entirely alien to, or even imperfectly connected with his natural,

chosen interests. But he was far too able to despise exact knowledge in itself, too sagacious and sympathetic to disparage those who sought it. Nor had he any inclination for fashionable pedagogic theories of perpetual ease and pleasantness. From first to last, Flecker's settled aim was to find the highest form of beauty, to seize it, and to make it comprehensible to others. Probably he immensely overrated their desire and capacity; and so he passed through the world the eager guardian of a treasure which the majority neither coveted nor could grasp.

He did not belong to that section of youth whom the "new psychology" was training to turn in upon themselves, and to flout consciously and intentionally everything which they supposed to be old or established; he had the sureness and catholicity of taste which belong to true greatness. But he had caught a glimpse

Of a dim splendour ever on before

and so he might be intractable to rebukes which seemed to him irrelevant, and careless about things which, if important, were not so for his particular aim. He was difficult to manage, specially in a class-room, and he often missed the way to an obvious and commonplace success. All of which misled, though in opposite ways, those accustomed to current methods of education, and those who were panting for new ones. Had Flecker stayed to grasp the situation he might have replied to both alike, Mais moi, j'ai affaire ailleurs.

He never put on superior airs, he never despised people of less ability than himself. There is plenty of evidence that his friends, whether schoolboys or undergraduates, though they realised that they could not, as a rule, match him in brains, always found him an eager, warm-hearted, unchanging friend. He would befriend shy new-comers, striving to set them at ease; and more than once risked blame by refusing to reject less desirable people who happened to care for him, whose feelings

he declined to hurt. In a letter which one of his aunts wrote after his death she said :—

" I have seen him entertain a room full of quite homely people in a most charming way. In evening dress, his was a most striking figure in any crowd. He was tall in spite of his scholarly stoop, with a most uncommon, clever face. No feature, with one exception, was especially beautiful, for the nose was too small and the mouth was too large for the face. But the eyes were wonderful, with their long curling lashes and black eyebrows : they, with his clear rather dark complexion and the general expression, made a subject that artists would have loved to paint."

As the writer had been an art student, this judgment is not wholly inspired by family affection, but is critical too. The mother of one of Roy's school friends, Mrs. McKelvie, wrote of him when he was at Oxford :—

" Roy has a very warm place in my heart. He is undoubtedly a very gifted man, and utterly straight in his dealings : I think his is a nature which takes a long time to mature."

It was inevitable that a character fundamentally passionate and so many-sided should encounter many difficulties in a public school. His old friend and master at Dean Close, T. M. A. Cooper, has jotted down a few recollections of him as a boy at school, adding a few notes on his later life. These observations have not the possible partiality of actual relationship, while they are full of the knowledge of a lifelong and very experienced friend. Of the Dean Close days Mr. Cooper writes :—

" Conversation never flagged on a walk with Roy when he was quite little. He had many things in which he took an interest, and many questions to ask. As he grew older, he took great delight in beautiful scenery, and I remember one long day in the Wye country which seemed to be a time of keen enjoyment for him. Strangely enough I can recall only one piece of our conversation that day. We were, I think, on the road between Tintern and the Wind Cliff, and he propounded to me an arithmetical puzzle (found, I conclude, in one of the popular magazines of those times) and asked for its explanation. In school, I had him for a time in an elementary Latin class. He had not the easy, orderly method of work of the budding grammarian, and I do not think he ever had the necessary preliminary inclination to become an adept in scholarship. His

interests lay elsewhere, perhaps to some extent in the subject-matter of his texts, to a somewhat greater extent in how those texts could be rendered in English, and probably to a greater extent still in the production of a text of his own, on his own chosen subject. His lapses in accuracy, tidiness, and general carefulness of preparation and conduct involved him in occasional troubles which he did not bear easily. He made too much of them, far more than those at whose hands they were inflicted, ever intended. But they did not amount to anything more that what we all have to put up with and remedy, and in another school, perhaps, neither he nor anybody else would have taken any special notice of them. Later on, I think, I had him in a French class, for I seem to remember a suggestion of his that we should put our Molière translation into English verse. He also came to me for geography, a subject in which he always retained an interest. In later days, he often used to speak quite justly of the badness of the text-book we used at that time. But, on the whole, I did not see much of him in school—he did not learn the things I was teaching for the greater part of my day. I remember however, that he began in those years to take an interest in Astronomy, in and out of school hours."

On a somewhat different point, Mr. Cooper wrote :—

"He did not strike me when he was young as likely to develop into the scholar who achieves great things at the University. Literary talent of that sort is mainly concerned with interpretations and appreciations of writings of the past, and I do not think that was Roy's bent. . . . His native instinct would lead him to do things of his own rather than to get an exhaustive knowledge of other people's."

Another Dean Close master is able to give information on the beginnings of Roy's unusual gift for translation :—

"In a happy moment I had suggested to the class that they might find it easier to translate French poetry into English verse, and I well remember how the idea was taken up, and how Flecker showed up quite a good verse translation."

So were laid the small beginnings whose ends were *Philomel* and *Pannyra of the Golden Heel.*

So far, an important part, the new educationists would say the most important part, of Roy's life has been left untouched, his holidays. From about his tenth year he spent these at the little house which his parents had

ON THE SHORE AT SOUTHBOURNE.

FLECKER AS A LITTLE CHILD.

built at Southbourne, then a country village, not, as now, virtually a suburb of Bournemouth. The surrounding country was wild, the profusion of flowers, "sand" species, therefore bright-coloured, such as yellow toad-flax and pink centaury, were, save those common also to the Cotswold limestone, new to children accustomed to Cheltenham's clay-soil flora. On one side of the house an open common stretched away: in the foreground, past Hengistbury Hill, the estuaries of the Avon and Stour, often covered with little white-sailed boats, were backed by Christ Church Priory's beautiful tower. Further south still, a spit of land jutted sharply into the sea, so sharply, that at Muddiford its fringe of trees appeared to run right into the water. Beyond again, lay the Solent's blue, shining waters, with the Isle of Wight's cliffs ending in the Needles, and beyond it all, with Swanage lying to the west, the open waters of the Channel. When their nurse took the children out Roy, who hated the Esplanade and all its appurtenances, clamoured for the yellow cliffs. As he grew older, the sand-dunes, with their unique charm, strangely spiked with dry, uncanny grass, supplanted the cliffs in his affections.

In his Cotswold wanderings with a geological hammer, he had discovered the delight of finding and getting out fossils. On Hengistbury Hill he found attractive, and to him new, bits of iron-stone; as he had found new flowers everywhere in the Hampshire country. Dearest of all of it, to him, were the pine-woods on Pokesdown Cliffs, which stretched away northwards into the New Forest. This country so wove its pleasantness into his thought and affections that the memory of it all never passed away. Mr. Cooper, writing in 1918 to Roy's mother, said:—

"I have said nothing about Roy at Southbourne. I think I was once on Hengistbury Head with him. He was young then (I think you must have given up the Southbourne home about 1896 or 1897); but I had no idea that the district had left much impression

on him, till I saw how in *The Grecians*, he built his new school there, and in *Brumana* (if I read the poem rightly) he discovered pines in the Lebanon comparable with those of the Hampshire coast."

In *Brumana* Roy was not only singing of the likeness of the Lebanon and Hampshire pines; he struck a deeper, more poignant note, as in illness and, so he felt it, in exile, recalling—

that long saga which you sung me, pines,
When, lonely boy, beneath the chosen tree
I listened with my eyes upon the sea,

he suddenly cried in the bitterness of pain, illness, and sore longing:—

O traitor pines, you sang what life has found
The falsest of fair tales.
Earth blew a far-horn prelude all around,
That native music of her forest home,
While from the sea's blue fields and syren dales
Shadows and light noon-spectres of the foam
Riding the summer gales
On aery viols plucked an idle sound.

Those who knew him in his boyhood remember how, at Southbourne, he preferred to wander alone, unless he could go with his father, for the two were close companions. Roy either would be alone, that he might listen silently, without interruption to the magical tale woven out of sights and sounds bathed in, shot through, with many colours, or he would have a companion who saw and felt it all as he did himself.

But on the Lebanon the "gossip pines" were changed. Burdened with illness and anxiety, he heard in their incomparable melody not the promise of golden possibilities, but the disillusionment of cheated hopes. This is obvious from a letter he wrote in July, 1913, to Mr. Frank Savery[1]:—

"Poem sincere enough, good God, was thinking of the Bournemouth pines."

It was at Southbourne, too, that the Flecker family

[1] *James Elroy Flecker: An Appreciation*, by Douglas Goldring, p. 96.

began their long and lasting friendship with Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Bell, the one an artist, the other a writer, and with their children. Mrs. Bell soon recognised Roy's brilliant gifts, and she dedicated one of her books to him.

When he was sixteen, he had worked his way almost to the top of Dean Close School, and his father thought it would be best for him to end his school-days under another headmaster. An effort was made to send him to Charterhouse, but he was far above their entrance-age. Finally, Uppingham was chosen, and he entered in January, 1901.

CHAPTER II

UPPINGHAM

It is an arresting fact that when Flecker entered Uppingham he had lived more than half of his allotted life. The difficult passage of an unusually dowered and dreaming boy into the artist, dramatist, and critic of life—all oddly conjoined at one stage with an able and useful British official—was to be effected, not without pain of body and travail of soul, in the short fourteen years left.

From the time when he left home, his letters are available for showing him as he was, and in relation to his circumstances. He was at Uppingham for five terms only, from January, 1901, to July, 1902. His first message home was a telegram :—

" Jan. 24th, 1901.
Arrived safe. Please send eggs and jam."

His first letter home, while bearing a family resemblance to any ordinary public-school boy's first letter from a new place, shows some few marks of more developed individuality ; and as it is his first, may well be quoted almost intact :—

" Jan. 25th.

Uppingham School.

Dear Mother and Father,

On my arrival here, a certain Miss T. took me round, and gave me tea and showed me my study, which isn't a bad one at all. I know almost all the fellows in the house by now, and am getting along grandly with them at present. I've got to have a tail-coat for Sundays.

There are three half-holidays a week here. Chapel was at eight this morning because it is a Saint's Day. After it, breakfast, for which I shall be glad of eggs as soon as you can send them. Then I had to see Mr. Haines. He talked a lot and told me he should want me to look after a dormitory later in the term.

. . . . . .

We went down to school at 10.30, and 'colonnaded' till

11 o'clock. Colonnading consists of standing in the colonnade and being cold and trying to talk.

Please send me some of my framed pictures for my study. Also any picture hooks you have got, as nails are not allowed. This last is a good rule as it keeps studies from being knocked about. Mine is very nice. My bookshelf came in fragments pretty well. Shall I get it mended here?

I should so like my big picture, and those other two small framed ones in my room, and the dog picture; and also any small ornaments there are anywhere about. If a fixture is fixed it's got to stay for ever. I've got a nice one in my study.

I went to 'unser' Master of Music wiz ze violin. He said I hadn't been under a strict enough master and wanted technical training. So I'm going to get it hot evidently. He's a Deutscher and his name is David.

Haines' is, I think, the best house for studies: we have electric light in ours (he has his own dynamo). I am the only fellow in the house in either of the sixth forms. Give my love to all at home and take heaps for yourselves.

Your loving son,

Roy."

Not all his letters differ sufficiently from the average boy's to be worth printing; others can be cut without loss. As his Uppingham time was too short to allow of any marked development in character, it is best to group his letters with regard rather to content than to chronology. First, in order of importance, are those dealing with his school work and unsupervised reading. Almost immediately after his arrival he wrote asking for

"Thucydides, book VI. (red Macmillan),
Virgil, Æneid VIII. (annotated),
Greek Testament, Westcott and Hort,"

adding critical items of information:—

"I have had nothing really terrible to do as yet, except Sunday Q's, for the Rev. Carus. . . . I enclose a copy of the questions. Would the Museum like them to put with the other antiquities? . . . We use here 'Notes in Greek and Latin Syntax,' a most weird combination."

From early days Flecker held very definite views about methods of education, whether of actual teaching, suitable books, or problems of examination. From his schoolboy complaint, mentioned by Mr. Cooper, to his threat

during his last illness of "having a whack at the Cambridge locals," his views were original and vigorous. His critical turn appears in another early Uppingham letter:—

"We had a very interesting lecture on Sicily with lantern slides on Thursday; the lecturer, a certain Mr. ——, F.R.G.S., etc., distinguished himself by showing some excellent photographs that he took of an eruption of Etna (1893 ?) and a gross ignorance of the classics, which Dr. Selwyn remarked upon in class afterwards."

Later on in this letter he mentioned his actual work for the first time:—

"Rather a curious thing happened with regard to my work. I forgot to do some verses which had to be shown up before breakfast. Dr. Selwyn was annoyed and wanted them as soon as possible. I rushed through the lot (16 hexameters) in 25 minutes. He called me up after morning school and wanted to give me another copy. When he heard, however, that I had done the lot, he was amazed, and thinking they must be very inferior ones, asked me to show them him when corrected. Curious, but they were as good as I had ever done; I got 27 out of 30 for them, and am going to show them him to-morrow. What a sell for Mr. Cheeser!"

Towards the end of his first term at Uppingham, he wrote the following short letter to his mother, giving her details of his school-work and his home-coming, and then drifting on to his real interest, his own literary work:—

"Dear Mother,

Selwyn the immortal set me for last copy of Latin verses *gratae vices*, the pleasures of change, metre according to choice, the which reminded me that it was time to write for *argent de Voyage*. I arrive by the express from Birmingham that gets in somewhere about 12.20 as usual. . . . Thursday entirely occupied with small Plato exam., rehearsal, and concert. I won 3*s*. 6*d*. at Fives tournament—invested in picture, 'Ulysses deriding Polyphemus,' framed, and four of the excellent 'hundred best' prints. I am getting to understand a good picture and the interpretation thereof. I count this and the better appreciation of music as one of the best things of the term.

I got 93 out of 100, Latin Grammar—great improvement, never got over 90 before. I have read twelve books of *The Odyssey*,

several *Bucolics* of Virgil, the first book of Lucretius (thoroughly), and some Pindar (*Nemean Odes*) by way of private work. For amusement I have versified most of the *Pervigilium Veneris:* and have concentrated my execrable habit of scribbling into a single effort, having finished my long poem—nearly 700 lines! [1]

Your loving son,

Roy."

Any reader must see from such a letter as this that Flecker was quite unlike the average schoolboy who gets through uncongenial work somehow or anyhow. But against his satisfaction over his developing taste for pictures and music must be set some considerable consciousness of failure in the more exacting parts of his school work, which is plainly set forth in his next, dreadfully bored, letter :—

"I'm certain there can't be any rain left for the holidays, it's been raining three days on end.

Exams. horrid—don't like them at all: can't do much, and am afraid shall not be very high. . . . A history exam. to prepare for to-night. Mr. P. rather sick with my weekly papers, says he'll give me a stinging report. . . . But those marks don't count and I mind very little. My music is not going well. I keep on forgetting practices, and twice I've forgotten a lesson: they come at such awkward times. There was a music exam., and I came off rather badly. . . . Five and a half more days after this."

In all his letters there is, perhaps, less direct reference to Greek than might be expected. In an early undated letter, however, to his parents, he shows his love both for the outside and inside of Greek books :—

"I have had the little paper Homer bound in two vols. in buckram."

Flecker cared exceedingly for daintily and fitly-bound books. At this time, besides his "out of school" work with Latin authors, he was giving a good deal of his unsupervised time to Greek also :—

"I got out of the library Mackail's *Greek Anthology* with a translation underneath, and am reading it through myself, not allowing it to interfere with prep. of course. I am working hard now, and strive to get sent up in Greek verses: very good

[1] The Poem was *Phaon.*

copies are 'sent up,' and three copies give a prize on Speech Day. We have a grand master for Greek verses—but the Latin verses of the bottom half of the form are looked over by a disgracefully lazy animal, who will pass over eight lines with a 'Yes, those are all right.'

But, to return to the *Anthology*. I expect I shall have to (have to because I cannot and do not try to get over the old habit) make some verse translations of select odes.

Apropos of verse there is a prize poem here—English as well as Greek and Latin—the subject of which is given out at the end of term. Of course I shall enter. There is no chance of my getting it here. . . . The fellow who got it last year (he is not allowed to compete again) is second in the school and second XV. football. As he is in the house next to ours, I often go up and down with him. He is most literary for a boy, and a nice fellow all round."

In a letter of the summer term of 1901, he gave his parents some details of his work and private reading, mixed up as usual with requests for books to be sent :—

"I got *Golden Treasury* in excellent condition at Birmingham, but could not get the Postgate's *Propertius*. Jebb's *Ajax* is in my box. I don't think I can get a Postgate's *Propertius* here. Can father get one for me? . . . I have read *The Woman in White*, part of *Barnaby Rudge*, and tried to wade through Hugo's *Les Misérables* also Kipling's *Departmental Ditties*. . . I still await *Anthology*. It is, perhaps,

in my bedroom,
in the Châlet,
in the schoolroom,
among the books on the bookshelf outside the study.

Sorry to give so much trouble."

Flecker's letters show one notable trait in his character, his unvarying and considerate courtesy to his own family, and especially in such matters as troubling them to send him things. There was in him no touch of that brusque taking kindness for granted which ruins not a a few people's demeanour in their own homes. He was, of course, at all times in his life surprisingly untidy; and yet, as this letter of detailed suggestion shows, there went, in his contradictory fashion, alongside of the surface disorder a quaint kind of order in his arrangements.

Hard work and varied private reading continued throughout the year 1901 :—

"I have read de Quincey—about murder and nuns, and mail-coaches and Levana ; very pretty but rather useless."

This surely is one of the least explicable of all Flecker's literary judgments. The letter continued :—

"Apropos of work :—

If you have translations of the following it would enormously assist me :—

Thucydides, VI.
Demosthenes, *Midias*.
Cicero, *Philippic* 2.
(Dem. *Olynthics*) not so important.

Pliny is a relief after Cicero. One of Myers' *Classical Essays* has quite converted me to Virgil. It is marvellously written.[1] Have you read Tyrrell's *Latin Poets?* I don't think much of it.

Please send me my *Story of the Persian War* by Church, in your bookshelf. It would be invaluable to me as we are now doing that period of history. . . . I forgot to acknowledge the Bury, which arrived radiant and smiling.

Will summer never come? Not with fitful gusts of sunshine and mornings chill as January, but real languorous summer when one can actually lie in the sun and long for the shade. Not but what even to-day I was constrained to drink ginger-beer in the lucid intervals of cricket.

I have been permitted to read some letters of John Ruskin to the Mother of the Captain of the House. Slight they were, but even in the few short lines grace and beauty more than in a thousand ordinary missives of common men. I am now reading *Heroes and Hero-Worship*. What a fine style it is written in, brief and strong and convincing.

I have been reading a lot of Ruskin lately—*Stones of Venice*, *Modern Painters*, etc. The more I read, the more I love and admire the man. I know not whether this is a fad : I hope it will be a lasting one. It is, I suppose, hero-worship.

Of Carlyle I have read little, of Charles Kingsley little, yet these are the two preachers I place in my heart on a level with him.

Are the roses in bloom yet? Do send me some if they are."

[1] When Flecker thus criticised Myers' Essay on Virgil, he was just over 16½. So competent a judge as George Wyndham, in his *Introduction* to Francis Thompson's *Essay on Shelley*, wrote in 1908 :—

"The only recent English Essay on Poetry—and therefore on life temporal and eternal—which challenges comparison, as I read Thompson's *Shelley*, is Myers' *Virgil*, and specially the First Part.

I think these two are the best English Essays on Poetry of our day."

The reference is to the beautiful rose-garden attached to the headmaster's house at Dean Close School, the garden of which Flecker wrote in the short poem, *From Grenoble*, first published in *The Bridge of Fire* :—

I hate this glittering land where nothing stirs :
I would go back, for I would see again
Mountains less vast, a less abundant plain,
The Northern Cliffs clean-swept with driven foam,
And the rose-garden of my gracious home.

From letters full of records of games, the cost of butter and his consumption of jam, a few more facts may be cut about his developing tastes, the progress of his work, and the books he was reading in and out of school. All these details belong to the autumn term of 1901 :—

"Friday I did absolutely nothing—for there is no school—but unpack and read. I finished the *Paris Sketches* and read a lot of *Old Mortality*. . . . Have you got Reid's Pitt Press *Pro Milone?* If so, please send it as soon as may be, and if not *send me please any sort of plain text* till I can get the other. Please send me also from my room that section of *Attic Orators* with Demosthenes' private speeches in. I think I have a little Teubner of the same somewhere."

"I must do some classical author worth reading. Stichus I am doing out of school with Selwyn. Accidence papers on Saturdays. Could any more uninteresting set of books be imagined than

Thucydides II. (done before).
Demosth. : *Timocrates.*
Cicero : *Pro Milone.*

Do you wonder I fly to Stichus and Pindar in dismay? Have you heard from Selwyn yet about my schol.? If so, please tell me. I see Exeter has £80 schols. to offer. For myself I should prefer Exeter, Wadham, or Trinity. In music I am trying to master a Fantasia of Bohemian melodies by Hans Sitt."

"We have now a little 'eranos' or literary society ; the masters ask a few of us to their rooms once a week and we read and discuss poetry.

H. gave me a slight lecture the other day for helping people too much in their work. I showed a youth the way to do a Latin

PART OF THE ROSE-GARDEN.

prose, and he went and got it all right!—which was an exception to his rule. . . . H. has got two peacocks which wake me up at 6.30 with a noise like a fog-horn with a cold."

"In leisure hours this week I have played Fives chiefly and football. I have also read a book of More's *Utopia*. I return it to-day to read Symonds' *Greek Poetry*. If you object to my reading in this way I will stop it, but I suppose it is as important as anything else for the essay and general knowledge required."

Mr. Cooper, in his recollections, dwelt on Flecker's disinclination for minute scholarship of the "textual" kind, his taste for the contents of literature, and his still greater desire to be himself a maker of it. In one of these Uppingham letters, Flecker refers to a more damaging characteristic, his untoward liability to "howlers." His letters prove beyond dispute that all through his terms at Uppingham he wasted no time, his days were filled with work, wide reading, games, and music. As the scholarship examination approached his anxiety about the more purely academic quality of his work increased:—

"I got 14 for Latin verses out of 15 (Alcaics), which pleased Selwyn rather. But I don't seem to suit T. as much as H.; he never gives me good marks for my proses, partly because I cannot get them entirely free from howlers I suppose. But I have had no more torn over. 16 out of 20 for Greek verse. Music much more enjoyable. Fantasia of Hans Sitt on Bohemian Melodies. I do a great deal of Pindar. As for the scholarship prospects the matter *οὕτος ἔχει*. The subjects required are Latin verse and Unseen and Greek do., essay, general knowledge. Now, Latin verse is a thing much of chance, according to how a piece suits you, but if I keep clear of howlers I think I ought to manage as well as anybody. In Greek verse I find my vocabulary at fault without a dictionary. Still, I generally get 17 out of 20, but am very apt to howl.

In prose, according to H., I am all right; according to T. all wrong. If I keep out of howlers I ought to do. I think I do not keep close enough to the original to please T., but I generally make very few mistakes. I fear schol. pieces may be harder, however.

On the whole, I can't tell a bit. In matter of English style I am inclined to 'rhapsody'—might please the Oxford man, but I shall try to keep clear of it. I don't keep clear of it here though, and

won't for all the Ts. and Hs. in the world. It always seemed to me significant the way Mr. Haslam[1] ran down that piece of Carlyle in my essay, when he thought it was my own! So it is: we are expected to write in a cut and dry Johnsonian style, without cultivating either ideas or style of our own.

I rebel. Why mayn't I write as enthusiastically as Symonds or Myers? Mr. H. would call it balderdash, Mr. T. bunkum. T., however, does not mind it much if it is to the point."

As the date of the examination drew nearer still, his nightmare of possible howlers, though it did not pass away, lessened somewhat:—

"I am low down in form because a howler meant no marks for a copy, and I repeatedly got mine 'torn over.' But the onslaught has wrought wonders in me, and I think my last copy of Latin verses has been sent up for good: I got 14 out of 15 for them, and Selwyn kept them, instead of giving them back: no howler either.

I was very much annoyed about my Greek verses. I should have been sent up for them, too, had I not got the genitive of Poseidon with a short omicron. As it was, I got 19: they were done without books. For prose and unseen we are not sent up. The unseens are, as a rule, so easy that I spoil them by too elaborate translations: I seldom get a bad mistake. I sometimes mar my proses by howlers, but less often now. Strange to say, my Ciceronian and Thucydidean style appears to be excellent: somehow or other I must have caught the rhythm. Now, as I understand, you have entered me only for Trinity. Please enter me for Wadham at the same date (Dec. 10th) and any others in the group. . . . Had a grammar paper (Latin) this week: 84 out of 100. Never could do grammar papers: want some 'sessions.' Tell Mr. Ellam[2] this, and say that I owe it to him that I am not more hopeless still. Tell Mr. Haslam, too, that if I should gain any success, I shall remember how very largely it is due to him. You yourself, of course, my dear father, are the prime cause of everything; and I cannot forget that in the matter of classics."

Though things seemed to be going rather more favourably he was not swimming in altogether fair waters, as this quaint conjunction of statements suggests; the letter was written in November about a month before the Examination fell due:—

"Had two copies of verses looked over. Fairly cursed by Selwyn D.D. Took exercise in the afternoon."

[1] A Dean Close Classical Master.
[2] Senior Classical Master at Dean Close.

He had just had his seventeenth birthday. Every kind of family anniversary was important and dear to him, and his birthdays he looked upon with special satisfaction. His home letter of thanks seems worth quoting whole, it is written evidently in one of his sunniest moods :—

"Nov. 7th, 1901.

Dear Father and Mother,

I scarce know where to begin or where to end. Thanks for the lovely Keats, my favourite poet, in such an enchanting edition : thanks to Claire and Joyce and Baby for their gifts, for which had I time Claire should have *Epistolam Latinam*, Joyce *une chère petite lettre française*, and Baby *ein deutscher Brief*. (Cross out unnecessary consonants, for I do not know which to put in.)

But what with the necessity of thanking for many gifts and for discoursing on theology, scholarships, house matches, hampers, friendships, and footer shorts, especially of the latter, and of expressing my unbounded gratitude and satisfaction at having clean stockings on my feet, I am plunged in the sea of despair and in the ocean of perplexity.

When a person has worn football shorts four times a week for seven weeks the said shorts are apt to get, ahem, inconvenient. As I cannot play in such hampering apparel as trousers which might get dirty, and am precluded by modesty from bathing drawers, there is little alternative. . . .

It is settled that I try for Trinity on Dec. 10th. Will you see about rooms, and if you could give me papers about the schol., I should be very obliged, as Selwyn has only got last year's.

This means practically that my term ends on Dec. 9th. We break up on the 19th : the schol. exam. lasts for two or three days and it will be hardly worth while coming back. Selwyn very much wants me to wait another year : as he says I am going up a year at least before time, and only a genius could get a schol. at my age.[1] To wait till next year only means another term at Uppingham, and for my last term I might probably be head not only of my house, but of the school. Still, an attempt will do me no harm.

I get to love Keats the more I read him.

Much love to all and thanks once more for the lovely presents."

Keats made a great impression on him evidently, for ten days later he wrote home again, saying :—

"Have finished *Endymion*. Am beginning to see something more in it than beauty of description. Shall proceed to *Hyperion*. Have read all the other long poems."

[1] He won the open Trinity Scholarship at the forthcoming Examination.

While Flecker was at Uppingham the very definite religious views which had been carefully implanted at Dean Close, underwent those natural changes, which so often result partly from individual development, and partly from a different environment. An undated, but obviously early letter, the only one which confessed to home-sickness, has a reference to his religious outlook when he first left home; writing to both parents at once he said :—

"I thought you might be glad to know that I was as happy as I could be away from you . . . if you knew how much I did miss home. If one says that one has an enjoyable tour abroad, it does not mean that one does not miss England. . . .

My text is up in my study. I have not gone to Communion yet. . . . . Could you send me some time or other, it is not very important, any little *Ancient and Modern* hymn-book you have, for use in Chapel. We use, besides, a school hymn-book; many of the hymns were composed here. The service in Chapel is chanted from end to end; there are two Chapels—one at ten without sermon, and one at four with a sermon. Most of my time on Sundays is occupied with Sunday questions; it is about the busiest day in the whole week I fear."

During this first term, the change in his outlook began to appear. Evidently in answer to a question, he wrote as follows to his mother :—

"Now to answer your last letter. What is the awful and terrible thing that has prevented me from going to Communion—so awful that I should keep it back from mother? Smoking, gambling, swearing, drinking, or worse? Nothing of that sort you may be certain. Then what?

First, the place was strange, the surroundings strange, my fellow-communicants strange. This applied for the first week or so.

Secondly, that I am convinced, nor will mountains shake my conviction, that it is unprofitable to go to Communion more than once or twice a term. Of course I shall go on Easter Sunday. So much for the most important point in your letter."

Flecker carried out his intention. On Easter Day he wrote to his parents, both together, as his habit often was :—

"My last letter home, I hope to have one from you on Wednesday morning. Many thanks for the journey money.

I went to Communion this morning: there must have been 300 fellows in attendance. There was sacred music in Chapel on Friday; Chapel is well decorated with lilies, etc. Lovely day to-day. . . .

Uppingham is monotonous, and the country round, though pleasant, is uninteresting. On the whole, I think Cheltenham will be very welcome, not to mention the 'rambling old house' by the waters of Ocean. . . . I can't find a stamp, and can't get one as it is Sunday."

This concluding sentence becomes amusing when compared with the complaint which opened one of his first letters from Oxford. Part of the Easter vacation he spent at Alresford in Hampshire. He wrote one letter home to his mother, which shows that liking for "quite homely people," with which he has been credited, and also a hint that he was beginning to have some preference among different churches:—

"Yesterday was fine because it was Sunday. In the morning Uncle John and I drove to Ovington where he had to take service for the old parson. I never saw such a tumble-down rectory: it was darned and patched all over, just like one of my stockings.

It is very pretty down by Ovington: there are lots of little streams running all over the place like a spider's web.

In the evening, H. and I walked to Armsworth: the others drove. We went in, as we were early, to see the H.'s: they chirped like a pair of old canaries when we came in—aren't they dear old people?—and inquired about you and father and Claire and Joyce, and Oswald and Miss S. and everybody.

We then had service in the wee little chapel-room, with a huge congregation—there must have been at least thirty people there! I prefer both Ovington and Armsworth to S. Mark's."

A letter Flecker wrote in the autumn term of 1901 shows that although he had just previously made the characteristically vehement statement that mountains would not shake his conviction—a curiously mixed metaphor—yet as a matter of fact his mind was working vigorously on religious problems. "The former things" had to some extent "passed away," and so far he had found nothing definite and satisfactory to take their place. Like a previous letter, this one was drawn forth by remarks which his mother had written. As it is a

kind of landmark, it has not been cut in any way, long as it is; it is singular in being carefully dated :—

"Sunday, October 27th, 1901.

Dear Mother,

Before a word of anything else, I will take the texts and discuss upon them.

Take prayer meetings first: take say the —— prayer meeting. I attended it once right through a term. I now analyse my reasons for attending it. My reason was, I found, not to obtain help; nor did I go there because I enjoyed praising God. No: I went there simply because I had a vague idea I would go to heaven if I attended prayer meetings, and please you at the same time.

Again, what were the results of the said attendance? I heard very similar exhortations every time, as I have heard in every single thing of the sort, conversion, etc. Believe in Christ—nobody ever took the trouble to explain what is meant by this faith—for that, we must look to the miracle read in this Sunday's lesson, which gives the three stages of Christian faith: *credo Christum, credo Christo, credo in Christo* (I believe Christ, I believe in Christ, I believe on Christ).

Stress was never laid particularly on doing good works. The idea seemed to be, 'Feel a very enthusiastic Christian, set a good example and you will go to heaven.' Better to be a Greek following Virtue for the sake of Virtue and for its own reward, than countenance such a creed.

Well, the result of this continual firing of texts into my ears, which the firers did not understand any more than I did, resulted in good resolutions. Which same lasted one, two, or three days as the case may be, and during that time I used to add a minute to my prayers, think a little over what I read in the evening, perhaps even go so far as to try and mean what I said, or realise what I heard in Church on Sundays, with a sneaking conceit that there were not three other people in Church who were trying to do the same.

What a farce indeed Church is! I do not write this down without thought. Every Sunday I grow more and more convinced. Say it was *un peu outré* to go to Church: would not the benches be crowded! Some go because they must, others because they want to go to heaven, others because it would be remarked if they didn't, others from some vague sense of fitness, others to study fashionable dress. What hypocrisy could be greater than this! Then words are read out, old and inadequate—in beautiful English true, but we do not go to Church to study English—and they absolutely *must* lose all meaning for most people through their parrot-like repetition.

Then we have to listen to the silly prattle of a young curate.

He may be an enthusiastic Christian; but did he really feel called? or did he think it was a nice respectable way of living? And if he has been called, is he to preach to men of twice his age and experience,[1] telling them to believe and never mind about works. Were I not obliged, I would not go to Church once a year, unless I found some little place where worship was earnest and real. Then, again, one church is an opposition church, and wrangles and disputes about its views with the mother Church. Roman Catholics are consigned to hell *en masse*—but our Evangelical Church is consigned to eternal felicity. We follow the Bible and the Early Church, and there are none like us!

What right have I, you say, to speak like this—a boy not out of his 'teens? Well, greater men have said the same. And surely, the whole thing is one which cannot escape the notice of a lover of Christ, however humble he may be, if he looks on with an unprejudiced eye. They are not H.'s views, as you might accuse them of being: though perhaps *Fors Clavigera* suggested one or two to me. I have thought of them and know them to be eternally true.

Now, for the texts.

'If two or three are gathered together.'

Yes, but in God's Name, not merely for asking His favour, but for doing His work.

Acts i., 12–14. This was not a weekly prayer meeting, but a prayer on a great and momentous occasion by a newly-founded Church. So in xii., 12, they were praying for the release of their great champion. In xii., 25, the 'meeting' was of two friends in deadly peril. In Malachi iii., 16, the saints were in the midst of unbelievers. Yes, if a great crisis is at hand, if there is great need, if the prayer meeting is held in secret, in bodily fear—not in the fear of ridicule which can but deter men from the cause, that is a different matter. And how would the true and sincere Christian look upon the passing away of one he loved? With unfeigned joy. He would not wear black, or shrink from festivity among his fellows. Only if the snapping of the string were painful might he be allowed a tear. Why do we mourn? Because we have lost the guidance, the counsel, the love of one who was dear to us? A selfish mourning. But we are not ideal Christians: we do need a physician, and therefore we must have our fill of sorrow.

For the first time I have set down my knowledge, not my opinions, on paper. A phrase here and there may be false; but nothing will shake my convictions. I may fall very far short of my ideal: but my ideal will never change.

I should like you to see Selwyn's book on *The Revelation:* we

[1] Flecker, when he wrote, was within nine days of his seventeenth birthday.

are still doing it, and weird ideas pour forth every lesson, leaving you to wonder how Daniel, the Messiah, the Seven Spirits, the Book of Enoch and the Sanhedrin formed a connection with forty stripes save one."

When all due allowance has been made for ideas which he may have more or less consciously picked up from other people, for some priggishness, and for an occasional curious failure of spiritual *flair*, this letter is on the whole stamped with great sincerity, not least when he hints at the kind of worship in which he would voluntarily join. To the extent of that remark, his vehement declaration, that he would not change his conviction, is justified. Also his quick passage from almost fierce controversy to lively quips at the expense of his headmaster is characteristic of his lifelong versatility of mood.

But though Flecker was a poet in the making, and though he was still easily engrossed in religious problems, he was, as well, a healthy schoolboy. His letters are full of news of sports, athletic training, home topics, the consumption of jam, all the usual interests of an English boy. He was not one of those boys or men so wrapped up in intellectual and æsthetic concerns that games and all the paraphernalia of active life were a torture or a nuisance to him. He did not shrink as, for example, Shelley did from the herd occupations of the natural boy, but took his part in them. For instance, he wrote to his mother :—

"My latest craze, or fad as you would call it, is running. I had already done a good deal of running, but what started me was that on Tuesday I had a race on the 'Ayston' course, 1⅓ miles long, very much uphill and down, with the second best runner in the house, beat him quite easily, getting round in 10½ minutes. Now the record for the said run is 9¾ minutes. . . . Therefore, after training by a 5 mile run yesterday, to-day I ran with the best runner in our house, the House Captain, to Oakham (6½ miles) and back, without any stop going (save 3 halts to ask the way) and without a single halt coming back! I ate a big tea. I have read Stephen Phillips' *Ulysses*. The first scene in Olympus is like a pantomime. For the rest it is magnificent!—

O that I might see
Gaunt Ithaca stand up out of the surge, etc.

Am reading Clough's *Poems*.
The country here annoys me. It seems to go like this ~~~~ for ever: still, it is very pretty in parts by the brooks: there are no rivers unfortunately."

Then, again, he writes to tell his mother about the school Rifle Corps:—

"Eh bien! I have passed the Morris Tube in style, 25 points (15 only required), one mark behind first-class shooting. Apropos of shooting, one day Selwyn says to me, 'Wait afterwards, Flecker.' Visions arose of bad proses, bad construes, no, it couldn't be that: what was it? Oh! he merely wanted me to join the Rifle Corps. The old brute to keep me in suspense like that. Also apropos of shooting—we had an excellent lecture by a Fellow of All Souls' and captain of the Oxford Cricket XI. on the war: he gave a good clear account of the manœuvres of Buller. There have been sports lately: mile, half, 220 and 100, I have run in, with indifferent success, tho' never too near the tail of my heat."

For future generations' benefit, the date, June 6th, 1901, of this epoch-making statement—

"I saw a MOTOR-CAR in Uppingham to-day"

should perhaps be preserved.

There is an amusing letter belonging to the summer term of 1901. In spite of constant paternal injunctions, the greater part of Flecker's letters are undated, though some few are headed with the day of the week. The scrupulous care manifest in this one seems to suggest that an injunction had, at least temporarily, penetrated:—

"Uppingham.

June 7th afternoon.
Posted 8th morning.

Dear Mother and Father,

About my violin. Fricker said he would give me £15 if I got tired of it, any day—without bow and case. I thought you'd like to know. Seeing the name of the school teacher, Mr. David, coupled with Rubinstein and a lot of other great pots in the corner of my Boosey, led to a conversation about him after the lesson. It appears, as doubtless you know, that he has written many things, and among them an opera which, if not an absolute failure, was not a success. It was called *Hans wacht*. 'John wakes' said the critics, 'and the audience sleeps.' Poor David, after four years' toil.

On Saturday the conquering hero, Captain Jones, came. By a stretch of unparalleled generosity we were let off half an hour school and a half on Monday. The Rifle Corps parade in vast solemnity down to the station; our drummer looks resplendent in his leopard skin. You will find him somewhere beneath the big drum. The fifes give a little squeak rather out of tune. The civilians line the palings, the élite of Uppingham keep the other side of the road discreetly. Punctual for once in its eventful and irregular life, the smoke is seen half a mile away. Someone suggests a luggage-train and we groan. But it is the proper sort after all. In ten minutes the half-mile is covered, and five astounding pop-guns proclaim its momentous arrival. A long wait in the station; we hope for the sake of the corps that it is the wrong train. But no, a slim figure in khaki emerges and a rather erratic wave of cheering arises. Captain H , after a soldierly embrace, gets him to walk at the head of the corps.

Then again the boom and squeak, and to the school march the glorious vermilion crowd, followed by a vast and seething throng of smart-clothed civilians. The masters assemble on the green in the quad. The chief robes himself in a great hood like a red ensign fluttering in the wind. The corps form an inner circle, we an outer. Sedgwick bawls forth his peroration—rather spoilt by a babe belonging to the élite who formed the inevitable rear. Captain Jones also bawls forth some soldierly words apropos of the corps, and there are more cheers, and one side sings *God Save the King*, and the other doesn't, and the solemn and impressive ceremony ends. . . .

What is life without jam? Nothing for breakfast, nothing for tea; and how long does a pot of jam or even marmalade last?"

Near the end of the summer term of 1901, Flecker caustically accounts for an extra holiday:—

"Got an hour yesterday from S.—because we were *the best and most industrious* sixth he had ever taught! I think S. wanted to go up to see the Haileybury Match."

His main hobbies at this time were photography and cycling. On one day in the summer vacation he rode 160 miles; and on another he pushed or carried his bicycle right over Helvellyn. He was in every way a healthy-minded boy. Naturally, he had the greatest dislike to coarse and repulsive things; a fact which did not appear so clearly always as it might have done, because of his temperamental unwillingness to seem singular,

which led him into an extraordinary, passing adaptability. He carried to an extreme the common tendency of all but the dullest people to be a different person, or rather to show a different side of himself, according to circumstances. This power of accommodation brought upon him, alike from members of his family and from outsiders, charges of invertebracy. He referred to these in one of his Oxford letters. It remains true that his natural tastes were contrary to everything "ugly": at Uppingham one day when his mother was visiting him, he grew vehement over the bad language carelessly used by some of the boys; he said that though he was the youngest boy in his form, the headmaster seemed to expect him to stop undesirable conduct.

In one of his letters from Oxford, driven to defend himself against what he thought unfair charges of invertebracy, he returned to this subject.

During his Uppingham days he wrote two quaint letters, one in French, the other in German, to his very small sister. Neither is remarkable, but they just deserve mention as evidence of Flecker's early facility in modern languages. Most English schoolboys do not burst into these, even to young, and still uncritical sisters.

Passages from the letters of his last two terms which have been saved, show anything rather than a mind at rest. His *malaise* had appeared in the previous November, when he had written to his parents:—

"I've rather sickened and wearied of the term by now."

During the spring, he wrote still in an uncertain mood:—

"My aim at present is to attain common-sense without becoming commonplace: and my reason for desiring to do this is because I want to leave the world a better place than I found it.

I am learning common-sense, I hope, rapidly. I really do not care a rap for my own soul—a soul is such a vague sort of thing; I am not quite certain I have one distinct from my intellect, not that I have any doubts of resurrection, but that I really don't know what a soul is—nor does anyone else; I only hope that it is higher than the mere principle of life, as some say it is.

I want to do my duty, because if no one did it, the world would be intolerable. We all have a debt to pay to former generations and to our country, and the debt must be paid in duty. If Haines should make me a præpostor, which there is no earthly reason why he shouldn't, I might do even more.

I spoke yesterday with success, in everything but votes, on the Japanese Alliance.

Does music affect the soul or the brain?"

In his last letter from Uppingham at the end of the summer term of 1902, Flecker wrote, as follows, to his mother and father:—

"I am excessively glad I came here, for I think I may say without boasting that I have found out more of the proportion of things. I have got to be a better judge of character—just a little—and have learnt to appreciate friendship. But I am excessively glad that I am leaving. I hate the place and almost all its associations. . . . I don't think many people here know what friendship means. There are not two masters who have the vaguest idea of the way to reach, or who can form a right estimate of, a boy's character. . . . Haines thought I was rather a fool when I came: and so I was: but though I hope to have become less a fool, his opinion has not altered one jot. Were I some huge swell—Cricket XI., Football XV., or anything like that, then I might sorrow. As it is, I look with unfeigned joy to a good riddance and a happy holiday.

Still, school days are over, and there is a sentiment that ever dwells in the past: therefore I send you these heartfelt lines on leaving, not so much Uppingham, as school-boy days."[1]

It was at Uppingham that Flecker began to devote himself seriously to the art and craftsmanship of poetry. In an early letter to his mother he said he had finished his "long poem." This was *Phaon*, a romantic tale, on conventional lines, of a youth, travelling with a friend, Areios, and fifty followers, to find his father whom he had never seen. He wrote the poem out in a small manuscript book, and sent it to his mother, with the dedication, already quoted in the first chapter. *Phaon* bears some resemblance to Morris' *Jason:* it has its *longueurs* and flat tracks, but though the phrasing is often

[1] The poem which he sent, *The Chapel Bell*, is hardly worth quotation. Uppingham drew from Flecker nothing comparable to the verse which Lionel Johnson wrote of Winchester.

conventional, dawn being still "rosy-fingered" and "the main," "wine-dark," yet here and there it rises above the level of ordinary schoolboy work. The poem was broken up into twelve idylls of unequal length. At the end of the second—*Calm on the Waters*—the following lines occur :—

They sailed beneath Italia's pastured shore,
And saw the sable throne of night afire
Where, northward, Etna flooded into flame
And cloaked the stars with whirl of sulphur cloud.
They sailed and saw to southward fair Carthage,
Aglow with marble palaces ; her harbour
Thronged with long galleys, Europe's merchantmen.

Storm followed upon this calm, and the boat ran upon a hidden rock and split. The "heroes" swam ashore :—

Breathless and weary, Phaon stood at last
High on the shore, alone ; but, looking up,
He saw embroiled among the waves and rocks,
Areios, who at the shoreward rush
To flee the final billow, left his side.
Then Phaon hurled himself into the night
And braved the foam again to save his friend,
And caught his frailness in a stronger arm,
And bore him swiftly, gently to the land :
. . . . . .
Like gathered lilies twain together laid,
Phaon in swooning sleep, Areios dead.

In the 700 lines of *Phaon*, there are no better passages than these : and these gain something by excision from the over-lengthy descriptions in which they are embedded. Two more lines, from the description of the burial of Areios, are interesting, as they are obviously reminiscent of the Southbourne scenery for which he cared so much :—

The sea, the cliffs, the escalading pines
Gliding in saffron mist, breathed happiness.

The *Bard's Song* in the eighth idyll is a specimen of

Flecker's lyrical capacity when he was between sixteen and seventeen. Two stanzas will suffice :—

There is a music of the merry earth
When every bird is chanting in the tree,
And droning fills the mead in summer hours
And distant sheep bells tinkle from the hills.

. . . . . .

There is a music of the tiny stars :
Hearing it not, we feel it to be there—
The chime of worlds that roll in harmony,
The ever-sighing rhythm of the spheres.

Good, bad, or indifferent as these may be, it is safe to say that anyone, chancing upon them, with no idea of their origin, would certainly never father them on the poet of *The Golden Journey* and *The Old Ships*. Oddly enough, it is in a translation that he might more likely be traced. These verses, from his rendering of the *Pervigilium*, are not much like the original, but they suggest some shadowy echo which we might fancy belonged to Flecker's voice, however far away :—

Where the shapely poplars fashion
Leafy arbours down the dale,
Comes a cry of sweetest passion
From the darkling nightingale.

Singeth she : we do not follow
In her path of melody.
When shall I behold the swallow ?
When shall spring dawn forth on me ?

In later years Flecker was supremely successful in the exacting task of translation, and of his schoolboy attempts, his renderings of Catullus, some of which Mr. Squire included in his *Collected Poems*, were the best. There is an earlier version than the one in *Collected Poems* of *Lugete, O Veneres Cupidinesque*, of which the following variations are a little closer to the original, and perhaps not less musical than the later one :—

he had been bred
To know his mistress, even as a maid
Her mother :

and this other :—

But now—he's flitting down the shadow way,
Whence, say they, none return.

His Uppingham rendering of Catullus xxxi., *Sirmio*, is very different from and, on the whole, poorer than the version in *Collected Poems*, but these three lines are worth saving for purposes of comparison. Flecker ceaselessly polished his work; and instances of his alterations are worth something to all who really care for the growth of his poetic power :—

Whether set in mere pellucid, or in Ocean's freer flow,
Ah ! the welcome sight to see thee lying all unchanged below,
Scarce believing I have left them, left the wilds of northern snow.

His translation of Catullus ii., made at Uppingham, did not appear in *Collected Poems* :—

Sparrow, the treasure of my lady love
With whom she ever sports, whom to her breast
She ever fondles, and to whom she gives
Her finger for the asking, chiding thee
To eager peckings, whensoe'er my darling,
My own bright darling pleases prettily
To frolic, and allay herself of sorrow.
Nor wrongly ; would that I, with restful passion
Could like my love disport myself with thee,
And chase the evil troubles of the soul.
As pleasant this to me, as in the tale
The little golden apple, the undoing
Of Atalanta, Maiden swift of foot,
That loosed her lengthy bond of maidenhood.

His version of Catullus ci. is undated. In all probability he made it along with the rest while he was at Uppingham :—

Ave atque Vale,
Catullus.

———

O'er many lands and seas I come,
My brother, to thy funeral
With the last tribute of farewell,
And vain address to ashes dumb.

Ah shameful wrong! unhappy day
The sundering of thee and me
By thieving fate's unkind decree
Who sped my brother far away.

As did our fathers, even I
Give honour to the mournful bier:
Receive them with a brother's tear
Eternal greeting and good-bye.

One poem, *Song of the East*, not remarkable for anything else, shows that already, in his schoolboy days, his mind was at work on Eastern countries and things. In June of his last term at Uppingham he contributed a poem, *Danae and Perseus*, to the school magazine. These few lines are an example of his attempts to convey colour:—

Sleep, for the orbéd moon has unveiled herself from her shroud;
Silvered a mirror of sea from a rift in the violet-cloud;

And the stars are appraising her beauty from every tress and fold
Of Heaven's ensabled mantle, clear shimmering in distance cold.

. . . . . .

E'er mounting the sapphire stairway enthronéd on fiery car,
In scarlet and saffron the sunrise is signalling hope from afar.

Apparently Flecker, while he was still at Uppingham, began to experiment with the lighter *forms* of poetry. At any rate, among his manuscripts a *Triolet* and a *Villanelle* have been preserved. The first is hardly more than a jest:—

There are fishes in the sea,
But they're very slow at biting:
Little angler, you'll agree,
There are fishes in the sea,
Yet there's not a shrimp for tea,
Long and patient toil requiting.
Yes, they've fishes in the sea,
But they're very slow at biting.

The undated *Villanelle* is a more serious, but only passably successful effort in a kind of composition which is never very easy, and was too artificial and fettering to be really congenial to Flecker. Probably during his

later school-days, he translated into two four-lined verses the first six lines of Catullus' *Vivamus mea Lesbia.* The first of these, with its humorous, bitter-sweet impatience, is no bad index to a mood which, naturally enough, overtakes an artistic temperament, called on to wrestle with diurnal stupidities and vexations :—

Let us live and love, my dear,
Aged fools despising,
All their lecturing austere
At a farthing prizing.

If there be little or nothing in all this youthful verse which proclaimed indubitably Flecker's eventual power; yet, if from the other end of his life, when his work lies unrolled before us, we look back on these beginnings, there is some interest in tracing the first faint signs of what he would one day achieve.

At the examination of December, 1901, which had been the subject of not a few doubts and surmises, Flecker won an open classical scholarship to Trinity College, Oxford. He was then one month over seventeen. When he left Uppingham in the following July, he had gained also a leaving scholarship, the school prize for Latin epigram, and the Nettleship prize for English essay, on the subject of *Urbanity.*

His own sentiments about leaving the school have already been shown in the last letter he wrote home in July, 1902. His house-master, Mr. Haines, has furnished this short summary of his view of Flecker's school career :—

" Flecker came very late to Uppingham, and so was only under me a short time.

His ability was even then conspicuous, but I don't think he took kindly to discipline, and I am not sure I secured his affection or esteem to any marked extent. He was head of my House, but his late arrival, and his comparatively moderate prowess in games did not enable him to become a very effective Captain. He had the root of poetry in him and was bound to make himself famous."

It will be remembered that in one of his letters home

Flecker commented on the general inability of the masters to understand the boys. From the following impression, written by one of his Uppingham compeers, Dr. C. E. Raven, late Dean of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, the boys in the school seem to have succeeded very little better in this matter of sympathetic comprehension. Perhaps, always and everywhere, there is something in the English nature which prefers individuality and originality rather in retrospect than in present daily life :—

"When Flecker came to Uppingham, he was, of course, much older than the usual new boy, and I well remember the legends that sprung up to explain his coming. He was put into the sixth, and I think that we all realised at once that he possessed genius, the real thing that man or boy knows instinctively.

He was very much older in ways and outlook than the rest of us, somewhat sophisticated, decidedly unconventional in one of the most rigidly conventional of places, and generally challenging to us and our outlook upon life.

He had from the first remarkable literary power. I remember his poems, topical skits upon current school events, epigrams upon members of the staff,[1] etc.—the usual kind of ephemeral production, but in this case written with a speed and spontaneity that continually astonished us. He would suddenly in the middle of a construe lesson start writing with an air of distraction, and in a moment or two would pass round a set of verses satirising some one of us, or commenting with more force than politeness upon the author at whom we were labouring.

He had also great independence, cutting himself adrift from the very strong athletic tradition of the school, and criticising boys and manners, that most of us were inclined to accept with resentment, but without open questioning. Boys recognised his power, but he never suffered any persecution or unpopularity, so far as I know.

To the bulk of his school-fellows, he was simply a 'freak' (a widely applied title) : to the few who knew him he was recognisable for what he was, a boy of marked originality and outstanding ability. It was, indeed, his originality much more than his knowledge and scholarship that impressed us. I recollect the awe and amazement with which we received a scheme of his for the production of a translation of Pliny's *Letters*. We were reading a book of them, that had not appeared in any of the series of Keys to the

[1] These, after the manner of their kind, seem untowardly to have perished.

Classics, and Flecker not only planned to supply this need, but actually showed us a letter from a publisher, offering him £15 for an English version. He then proceeded to fulfil his plan, by taking down the translation, in form, as it was rendered to us by the form master. The ingenuity that could turn an exceedingly boring subject into hard cash, and could then make one of the staff do the work for him, impressed us with a sense of his capacity, that left us breathless and adoring.

His effect was that of a visitor from another sphere who burst in upon our school-life with a challenge to its most sacred traditions. He sneered at our moral standards, which were curiously perverse; he tolerated our worship of games but damaged it more by his toleration than he could have done by open revolt; he mocked our schoolboy heroes unless they could show a truer title to respect than mere dexterity of hand and eye, he went his own way, without affectation or self-consciousness."

CHAPTER III

TRINITY COLLEGE, OXFORD

WHILE Flecker was at Uppingham, he and J. T. Sedgwick, the orator at the Rifle Corps ceremony already described, became friends. After the Poet's death, Mr. Sedgwick wrote to his mother, sending to her some of the letters which Flecker wrote from Oxford. In the course of his letter, Mr. Sedgwick said :—

"It is true that Roy and I were friends at school. We had the common bond of sympathy which two intellectual schoolboys feel for one another, especially at smaller schools. We would both have been the better for being at a school like Winchester, where the intellectual life among the scholars is so much higher. . . . I remember him very well at school, he was always the brilliant not the thorough scholar. . . . One time, in the Greek grammar paper, Roy turned out with something like 76, the level of marks that was expected from the lower fourth. And he was never among the highest results. Yet at composition or unseen translation he would often bring off a startling success. He would never have been the slightest use as a research worker. He had the true artistic type of mind, casual, eclectic, brilliant. . . . I don't look back on my school-days as at all a happy time, and for that reason, perhaps, have treasured my recollections less than some boys do. We were also not only not in the same house, but were in houses far removed from one another. You mention walks together ; but all recollection of them has faded from my mind."

As Flecker went to Oxford and Mr. Sedgwick to Cambridge, their friendship, after school-days, rested largely upon letters, and gradually waned. Perhaps this extract from memories of Uppingham throws a little light even on Oxford days. Anyhow, this friendship produced some of the strangely few letters which Flecker wrote from Trinity about his literary projects and views ; letters which have been preserved, and will by permission of those into whose hands they came, be included here in their appropriate place.

Mr. Sedgwick, in these brief recollections of Flecker at Uppingham, emphasises the fact, dwelt on by all who came into closest contact with his work, whether as teachers or as specially sympathetic friends, that Flecker's gift was for creation of his own rather than for assimilation and criticism of other men's achievements.

He was at Oxford from 1902 to 1906. That period, in England generally, and more particularly in academic, artistic, and social circles, was singular. The mingled brilliance and decadence of the 'nineties had passed, never to be revived in quite the same way by a fresh generation. The opening years of the new century seemed, so far as poetry was concerned, curiously silent and empty.

John Davidson, rather more violent than of yore, almost developing something which could be called coarseness, Francis Thompson, ever more scantily as death drew nearer, and William Watson but fitfully, still were to be heard. The younger men, Masefield, de la Mare, Chesterton, W. H. Davies were beginning only. There was a quite apparent pause in artistic creativeness : but there was no pause in a kind of rather feverish intellectual activity, and none in the thirst for ease and enjoyment.

Mr. Shane Leslie, in his slight volume, *The End of a Chapter*, seized, with swift perception, on the essential attitude of young men and women belonging to the more or less leisured classes during those last few pre-war years.

In the first chapter of *James Elroy Flecker : an Appreciation*, Mr. Douglas Goldring described the same period too, though from a rather less synthetic point of view.

No doubt the peculiar and not altogether wholesome characteristics of these years were strongly marked at the two old Universities, and Flecker went up to Oxford when the ferment was working up to whatever climax it achieved. He was not quite eighteen ; and it must be remembered, not only for the right understanding of his

Oxford days, but of his whole short life, that his early education had been very definitely Puritan, and the fruit of such upbringing was obvious in new and different surroundings.

It is a platitude to say that, to some extent, Oxford and Cambridge are, for the freshman, his entrance into the world, even if it be the world *in petto*. There, more than at any school, are congregated all sorts and conditions: there, genius, mere ability, and stupidity meet, if only to part. There, every kind of idea can find a champion of some sort. Whether by the natural course of things, or by deliberate plan, religious or irreligious views, alien to those of his upbringing, were forced on his notice. Rationalistic and atheistical pamphlets and books fell, or were laid, in his way: and with his usual eagerness over fresh ideas he read them, and showed some degree of willingness to entertain some of them. Naturally, that distressed his home circle. Then, no more at Oxford than elsewhere did he disguise his intention to be a poet. The cliché, which might mean much or little, "Then you must know life," was at once thrust at him. The then "new," now rather *passé*, psychology, which harped ceaselessly on "experience" and "self-expression," helped in the same direction. On the lips of some of his mentors, all these catch-phrases led to paths of self-indulgence of all kinds, in talk and thought, if not always in action. Flecker's many-sided and impulsive self was thrown into a turmoil of new ideas, impressions, suggestions. The artistic refinement of conception and workmanship, apparent in his poetry, drew him to eschew coarseness: on the other hand, his distaste for singularity, his inclination to adapt himself to his company, prevented definite reaction against these counsels and promptings. Disturbed by these antinomies and forced into self-defence, he occasionally blamed the one-sidedness, as it seemed to him, of his earlier training. On his literary side he was far less open to influence, because there he was fore-armed.

He came up to Oxford with far riper views and knowledge than are at all usual at his age. He knew more of literature at first hand; he had thought and done far more with regard to poetry than most boys of eighteen. Dr. Flecker had striven hard to form his literary taste, and all through his life to the very end the Poet delighted in discussing with his father literature in general and his own work in particular. Again, his old friend and master, Mr. Cooper, had helped him; to him Flecker wrote interesting letters on his work, and retained always great confidence in his judgment.

At the same time, some of his Oxford friends, naturally, affected him. No reader of his early letters and poems can fail to recognise that he highly valued the sympathy and advice of one friend, of similar classical tastes to his own, to whom he dedicated his first volume of published verse. After college days this friendship lessened; and it was a grief to Flecker that a possible meeting which he, as he lay dying, greatly desired, did not take place.

Another Oxford friend, Leonard Cheesman, a Winchester boy, and afterwards a Fellow of New College, was killed in the war. His death was an irreparable loss to Flecker. Moreover, any memoir of the Poet is the poorer for the want of Mr. Cheesman's recollections of him. Perhaps not all of those who came in contact with him understood him perfectly. All his life long, Flecker was remarkable for a daring, inexhaustible wit, wit of that kind which at times plays riskily over life's thinner ice. This dangerous gift, with a double-edged aptness for tempting others, whether the dully good or the incurably vicious, to exaggerate its true import, sometimes needs the protection of friendly testimony which is at once morally sound and intellectually quick. At Oxford and elsewhere Flecker did not restrict his friendships; he liked variety, and was in touch with quite different groups of men. Not only Mr. Cheesman, but other intimate friends of his were killed in the war; thus not a few first-hand impressions of him have been lost.

The sister nearest in age to him, who, though not herself an Oxonian, could yet speak with the knowledge, understanding, and similarity of outlook which are possible to an actual contemporary, has furnished the following sketch of her brother as she remembers him in Oxford days :—

" The undergraduate world, swayed by men like John Davidson,[1] was in open revolt against the doctrine of the 'correct thing.' The first step to be won was freedom of self-expression. It became the one object worthy of ambition, and it is not to be wondered at if, in the eagerness of his attempts, a man was apt to confuse his search for himself and his search for truth. Consistency of conduct and a well-regulated life were scorned as the refuge of the unintellectual and moral coward. . . . Many, from motives of curiosity and a passion to *experience* things as they were, sought out ways of life that would otherwise have been naturally distasteful to them ; some adopted fancy cults and religions. Buddhism was very much the vogue. Men remembered the days of infancy with a curious interest in their immature selves, and discovered that the joy of trailing elephants on wheels down the streets could still be conjured up, and a fresh charm added to the game by the sensation it was possible to create. . . .

But there were others. . . . Many were led by their serious scrutiny of life deep into the study of human problems. There is, for instance, the impassioned plea of Roy that the argument for Christianity as a thing profitable to men, should be abandoned for the serious discussion of the question, Is Christianity true ? . . . The religious world looked askance at these young enthusiasts. . . . Exceptions there were, fine, wise men. . . . Roy was always ready to acknowledge the efforts of these men—and he was liked by them. He attended for some time Dr. Gray's Greek Testament Class at Wycliffe. He would enter eagerly into conversation with the missionaries who came frequently to seek in Oxford fresh recruits for their work. And so it came about that Flecker had friends among two different types—men who generally kept far apart. There were those who, definitely Christian, held his love by their genuine uprightness and frank affection ; and those, his intellectual friends, who saw in him brilliant talent, who worshipped

[1] *Scaramouch in Naxos and Other Plays.* 1889.
In a Music Hall. 1891.
Fleet Street Eclogues. 1893.
Ballads and Songs. 1894.
Fleet Street Eclogues. Second Series. 1895.
New Ballads. 1896.
Selected Poems. 1905.

him with a blind and almost fulsome adoration, who made him impatient of discipline—the discipline that in his verse-writing he never abandoned. He was fed on a diet of unstinted praise that made it hard for him to preserve any true perspective. They also set themselves to make the rather shy and modest nature they found in Flecker acquainted with the lower sides of life. . . .

He, no doubt, slightly undermined his health in these Oxford days by idiosyncrasies of diet to which he was always disposed, and by going in and out of heated rooms in bitter weather unsuitably clothed."[1]

Other members of his family shared this opinion that Flecker was flattered by one circle at Oxford until adulation became the most congenial atmosphere to him. This view, of which he was well aware, not unnaturally tended to create some degree of friction. This, however, did not prevent him from bringing home a letter from the late Sir Walter Raleigh, in which the distinguished professor told him that he was the coming poet of the day. He was not a little annoyed when his parents, always nervous lest his friends should persuade him that he had won the race before he had run it, showed plainly their disapprobation of this, which they considered excessive praise.

If the tendency, already mentioned, to accommodate himself overmuch to the company he was in, sometimes gave colour to a charge of lack of strength and independence, it perhaps contributed to making him socially delightful. His parties at Oxford, whether at times when members of his family went up to see him, or at others, were happy and successful functions, owing to his individual and minute care to provide to the uttermost for each one's particular tastes.

One of his Oxford contemporaries, who had met him first at Fritton Camp, and who possessed that kind of special knowledge which belongs to a family friend, has written a short recollection of Flecker as he saw him

[1] Flecker lost five overcoats during his residence at Oxford. So heedless was he about clothing that once when he asked the old servant who packed for him to put in white, not viyella shirts, his mother, unable to extract a promise that he would wear a vest under them, suppressed the linen ones.

at Oxford. It must, of course, be remembered that Dr. McKelvie's interests lay in theology, certainly not with the modern art and literature which filled Flecker's leisure, and some of his working time, at Oxford. This fact accounts for his obvious feeling that Flecker's tastes were "strange." After all, the ordinary Englishman does not concern himself with modern French literature as a man of Flecker's tastes and aims would do :—

"I first met Roy in camp in 1901 at Fritton. We did not get to know each other till the last few days of camp. Then we chummed up at once. He was very quiet in those days.

He came up to Oxford in my second year. My room at Exeter and his at Trinity were both on the Broad. We used to shout across invitations to each other. For the first year, he used to come to the Christian Union with me. Then, after that, his highly artistic sense led him into the company of brilliant bohemians and into the by-paths of exotic literature. We then saw less of each other, though I often used to drop into his rooms and he into mine.

His rooms were characteristic. Curious knick-knacks, strange fruits, rare liqueurs, choice tobacco, and strange books were all around. He had a rather finicking and very fascinating taste for such things; and anything strange and weird appealed to him. His knowledge of strange literature was immense. I often used to sit and listen to him reading from the by-paths of French art, or from some unknown poet. I remember he introduced me to the works of John Davidson, of which he was very fond. . . . The joy of literature was first born in me through my association with Roy.

At this time he became violently anti-Christian. Ostensibly, this change was due to the works of Max Nordau, whom he used to quote to me. Actually, the cause was his revolt from what he conceived to be Christianity. I don't blame him: for to him, at that time, Christianity was a decalogue of don'ts, and he had not realised that it embraces the whole of life with all that is beautiful, artistic, and hilarious. . . .

He was progged. Walking along in cap and gown and cigarette and dreams of Utopia, he bumped into the Proctor, and was immediately fined. I can remember how sick he was. He came to me and groused. . . .

He was a true and affectionate friend; a true bohemian: and a fellow with the greatest vision for beauty I have ever known. He was born to be a poet."

The testimony of a man's family and immediate friends,

while having an indisputable value, yet cannot avoid limitations. While it may be in some particulars even disconcertingly penetrating, in others it will be almost certainly mistaken and biassed: there are not only the veracities but the misapprehensions of intimacy. In family life and among the relations of genuine friendship it is still sometimes true that the onlooker sees most of the game.

Flecker was a somewhat voluminous correspondent: a great part of his early letters have been kept. From them may sometimes be gleaned those facts which he alone could really know, facts of desire, feeling, purpose, at which, after all, others can only guess. For the alert reader, selected portions of his letters may serve to correct or fill out these accounts by other hands, which if they reveal perhaps also hide. The left-out portions of his letters are those which are common to most of us as academic human beings, which reveal personality, but not his in particular.

It will be remembered that not many months before he left Uppingham he airily sent his parents an unstamped letter, pleading Sunday as an excuse for his stamplessness. There is a peculiar pleasantness in the fact that in his very first Oxford letter he told them that he objected, "on strict economic principles," to receiving an unstamped letter from them, adding "you know a penny means a lot of things." He added, "Am taking Catullus, Plato, and Trilogy for Mods. . . . Am very comfy."

In his next home letter he sent one of the diaries for a week, to which he was rather prone. Though he has been accused of undue love of adulation, one entry shows that he did not accept all compliments at their face-value:—

"*Tuesday*. Spoke at debate in evening on Luxury. Complimented by sec. on 'best speech of evening.' Believe this to be set form of encouragement to fresh speakers."

His early letters from Oxford are full of the details which beset every freshman, work, tutors, societies to

be joined or eschewed. One letter, written in his first October, may represent all of that particular kind :—

" Dear Father and Mother,

I seat myself pervaded with my usual optimism, to write to you. I am magnificently comfy : nothing particularly horrid to look forward to (except going surpliced to Chapel to-morrow because it is a Saint's Day). McK. coming to me to-morrow. May I ask him definitely to reserve himself leisure to lunch with you on Thursday unless wet ? Rugger and rowing are worked together ; so I am in luck. I want to join the Volunteers. I should not then have time to join the Musical. Besides, it would take up far less time. The Union sub. is ten guineas for all time ; else a guinea a term. To join or not to join ? Dinner is so much a night, and is a better dinner than any of the commoners get. . . . A *Churchman's Almanac* might come by post. Of the interviews with the amiable Pelham, Tutor, and the presentation in state to the Chancellor—all this I will tell you D.V. on Thursday.

Yours in serene and affectionate optimism,

Le Roi."

There are, of course, various letters on ephemeral subjects, such as visits of one or other of his family, and the necessary plans. All the *pietas* of home and family were an indestructible part of him. Sometimes differences of opinion appeared : that was inevitable in a family where each member had escaped that sort of dullness which in making no mistakes makes nothing. Such divergences made no difference ; home had the first place in his affections. Indeed, this family feeling spread out to more distant relations ; thus, after his first Oxford birthday he wrote to his mother :—

" It grieves me that Uncle has omitted me this birthday. It is the first time they have ever done so."

Nothing changed this family affection. Two years later, in thanking his parents for their birthday presents to him, he added :—

" I haven't heard from anyone else at all, except Iredale, who wrote a letter. I am rather surprised at Aunt R.'s forgetting me : but ' Morgen ist auch ein Tag.' No letter has come either from Aunt R. and Co., or Aunt E. and Co., or Aunt D. Limited."

However, he did not post the letter at once, and in the

interval a messenger arrived, which necessitated a postscript :—

" I thought Aunt R. and Uncle J. wouldn't forget me. There has just arrived this minute, without comment, a bewful sausage, about three ells long, of the sort of which I consumed vast quantities at Forest Hill."

At the end of the term, excusing himself for not having written an expected letter, he uttered one of his rare criticisms on Oxford :—

" I have never had so much to do in my life. I have never felt so disinclined to do it. It is such rubbish this work."[1]

Whilst he was at Oxford he perpetually changed his rooms. His first set looked on a blank wall, but he would not wait for the creeper, which his mother had permission to plant, to grow. Dr. Johnson's rooms were allotted to him, but he left them as they were sunless. The next set he had re-papered, because the paper recalled the " blue carnations " in the sanatorium where he had scarlet fever. As soon as the paper was put on, he left these. He had some trouble, and apparently also some wiliness, with his landladies :—

" I see my landlady every day. . . . Just while she is raking in the shekels I say to her : ' Truly, I am very comfortable, and you are the best cook in Oxford ' (which is, I believe, true) ' and it would be so convenient to me if I could have a little lunch.'

' O yes, Sir, certainly, and the gentlemen do say as I'm a good cook, as never boiled a potato till I was married, and I have got a new cushion for your sofy. Yes, Sir, the room would be improved by a curtain over the door, the man will put up the rod to-morrow.' "

It all arose, of course, from his sensitiveness to surroundings. In the midst of his many changes, he wrote to his mother :—

" You said you would like to know what I should like. Here goes—

Lamp shade.

Some books—F. Hamsen's Ruskin, *if it is good.* A Dante in

[1] Those interested in the problem of the performances of English Poets at our Universities, may care to recall the letters Thomas Gray wrote to Mr. West from Peterhouse, in December, 1736.

Temple Classics (Eng. one side, Ital. the other). A Shelley to conform with my Keats. Pictures. *Todteninsel*, by Bucklein (?) or someone, a German artist. You can get them easily in Germany, but not in England. Any Burne Jones (esp. *Golden Stairs*) or any Leighton would rejoice my heart. Of the *Andromache* of the latter I am specially fond."

Towards the end of his first year, having been able to tell his family the momentous fact, "I am through Divvers," he turned very definitely to his more important work and future prospects. Thus, in various letters, he wrote, "Could get into the I.C.S. quite easily I think. Greats philosophy has very little to do with it. Shall do the Newdigate before the Stanhope. . . . I am beginning not to be so sure I shall get a second in Mods." Perhaps in consequence of this doubt, but more probably impelled by his personal tastes, he began to think of turning his knowledge of modern languages to account. So he told his father—

"I want to take the exam. for the Taylorian Scholarship in French this year." (December, 1903.)

A little later on he wrote again urging his point:—

"Re the Taylorian, I am going to try and get a certificate on the schol. exam. Prof. Ellis approves.

Surely for a schoolmaster nowadays, a first-class certificate in French is almost as important and useful as a good class in Mods.—now that classical education is being shoved into its right place."

It is certain that Flecker while at Oxford read much modern French poetry; Heredia he had constantly by him, and probably Leconte de Lisle. The only direct reference to be found in his college letters is this:—

"Heard Saintsbury lecture on Théophile Gautier to-day. Théo is one of my favourite poets and I enjoyed the lecture very much."

Flecker spent the Easter vacation of 1903 at Capel Curig with a friend. When the latter left, he was rather forlorn:—

"When I get up in the morning from my camp-bed, which is hard—the bed I mean, not the getting-up—I have to light the fire (generally three or four times), draw water, dress, lay breakfast,

cook it, eat it, clear away, wash up, tidy the cottage up, and have to see to myself *alone*. In the meantime, by the time I am ready to go out, it is raining for all it is worth—so I sit down and try to read the badly-scrawled Logic notes I brought with me.

With a companion is one thing, solitude is another. Yet I enjoy it, because I enjoy everything. . . .

I really am too dog-tired to write any more. . . . I want badly, am longing for, any place where I can get breakfast without trouble, and work without being half-dead before I get to it. I must stay here till Wednesday next at least. Please send me Mill's Logic, if you can find it in my room, and the two volumes of Catullus. . . .

I really enjoy myself very much here, but I want to see you again, and besides that I can't do a scrap of work here. Although I read my Logic notes hard, I can't get them into my head. As I want to work I must return. I fear I shall have to work a great deal. . . . We are all selfish more or less.

Most people unconsciously think of themselves first. I do so consciously. It is a bad habit, but hard to get out of."

The 1904 Easter vacation he spent with his greatest Oxford friend at Bryn Cyfing. His physical energy at this time was remarkable. He sent his parents the following account of their separate arrivals and settling in to very homely surroundings, in which they worked hard and were happy :—

"Arrived (Corwen) 3.15 : found road in a horrid mess; head wind; mountain. Got into Bettws 10 minutes before J.'s train arrived. He actually had not lost himself. Worst 28 miles I have ever travelled. After 70 miles cycling, walked five miles with bag and bike to Pont-y-Cyfing. . . . J. would work after supper for an hour; he had to read Miss Harrison's *Prolegomena to Greek Religion*. To-day is perfectly lovely: just off to Conway. . . . J. insists on taking classical texts to read in Conway Castle."

Five days later, March 25th, he wrote again about the work they had done, the books they had read—*Balaustion's Adventure*, "a book of Lucan—who is hard," *Le Misanthrope*, and *Faust*. The letter closes on a note of happiness :—

"Ah! pleasant it is to be in the country of '*Forgael* and Dectora and the empty waters,' pleasant to be with a friend so strangely dear, pleasant to have no care and yet be working.

But sad that you cannot enjoy it too.

Think enclosed is young parsley fern (may be bracken for ought I know). Found it to-day and send it in J.'s cigarette-box forthwith."

It might be supposed that Oxford would afford him little ground for "care." Yet his way, all the while, was not absolutely smooth. In spite of his strong affection for home, an eventual clash was inevitable between the religious standpoint from which he was first educated, and the literary and artistic atmosphere into which his personal affinities led him. Two things only occasioned any real strain between him and his parents. The first was comparatively unimportant—his unwillingness, at all times of his life, to keep any sort of rational account of the money he spent. For a man of moderate resources, he was wont to spend more than he could afford, mainly on books and pictures to which he took a fancy, and which he was convinced he "could not do without." The other was more serious: it centred round his friendships, and turned mainly on more or less religious considerations. His sisters and brother were younger than he, and his friends were not always what his parents desired to have brought into the home circle.

Early in his first term at Oxford he took home to Dean Close a football team, composed of old friends who had gone up to Oxford and some new ones. As the new ones became, in time, more numerous, and less of the older type of his friends, trouble began to spring up. Sometimes the difference of opinion was concerned with religion only, sometimes with his own character, often it was mixed up with his friendships. His first Oxford letter to his mother about religion was written as he was passing from his earlier standpoint:—

"Union Society,
Oxford.

Dear Mother,

Both photos are fairly hopeless. My hair was never a sort of light grey! I suppose it is so sheeny that it fogged the plate a bit. . . . *Re* the Rits. I have, perhaps, slightly more contempt for them

than I have for the Evangelicals, simply because they *are* educated and ought to know better: whereas of all the Evangelicals I know, Father, Gray, and the Bishop of Durham[1] are the only ones whose brains command the slightest respect.

M., V., B., and M. are more or less mad, and the twenty odd Evangelical undergraduates I know, consist entirely of men without influence in their colleges, and whose collective brain-power would not suffice to run a tuck-shop.

And that silly clergyman who has not passed Responsions is certainly not to be taken as a specimen Ritualist any more than K. or the Weston-super-Mare Major are to be taken as specimen Evangelicals. Though I would rather be a rit. than an Evangelical, I would rather be a Buddhist than both. If you ask father, I am sure that he will tell you reluctantly that despite exceptions, such as Westcott, the average *intellectual* level of High and Broad Church parsons is far above that of the Low Church clergy.

Ever yours,
Roy."

Some time after, Flecker wrote with more heat on this question:—

"Some damnable ritualist has got hold of C., and is trying to make him go to Confession, etc. However, Stan. and I have persuaded C. otherwise, and we are going to be rude to this worm. He is a fool who cannot pass Responsions. Poor C. is so very trustful that he does not like to wound anyone's feelings."

Flecker's vehemence appears to have subsided as quickly as it arose. Anyhow there is no further reference to the episode, or to the fate of the threatened "worm."

Very soon, however, he became vehement in self-defence. Intensely sensitive to personal, as apart from literary, criticism, he particularly resented the charges of backbonelessness sometimes levelled against him. Evidently in answer to expostulations—of precisely what nature no one can now say, as he did not save letters—he wrote hotly, as follows:—

"Dear Parents,

Don't think I care for what H. (hypochondriacally mad), S. (eccentric mad), or Sk. (genius mad) drivel about my vertebræ. I am determined to be a greater man than either of the first two, in this small world of ours, and a rival of the latter.

[1] Dr. Handley Moule.

Why should I trouble to hear episcopal enlargements on Biblical platitudes? Why should my not troubling be a sign of intellectual wastrelity? What is a wastrel? Wish Murray had got as far as W. Last Sunday, I heard two sermons of the Bishop of Victoria: in the evening I went to Balliol and heard Brahms, Beethoven, Bach, Dvorak, Wagner. The latter preached the best sermons. I shall hear Winnington Ingram; he will interest me, being an orator I suppose. But I don't want to get instruction from sermons: because my views are fixed now, for ever and through eternity. H., S., and Sk. accuse me of invertebratism. Note first, they are all fonder of me than I am of them—(another letter from Sk. t'other day)—and time may come when they will court me. Again, while badgering continued, no volunteering for me: badgering having stopped, I desire . . .

Maybe you did not know that my invertebrate self had to quarrel with nearly all the House at school for their beastliness, and stopped it, though quite friendless. . . .

My invertebrate self is the only person in college who attends the Christian meetings or takes any part in such things. I persuaded my friend, however, to come with me. I should think I am the only person in the Varsity, save clergymen, Wycliffe people and the like, who has got a text hung up in his room. I am taking up missionary work though I hate it. For one who intends to be a leader of men, oscillation will not do. Laugh at me if you like, I don't care who laughs at me. I consider classical work as of minimum importance to me in my life.

Well, you will say I suffer from exuberant self-conceit. . . . Maybe, even in the early prime of life, Possibility lessens every day, and Fact encroaches ever. But your car is driving towards the grimly peaceful mountains in the West, for me the night is fading, and I may look over the illimitable ocean for the first ray of dawn. 'Tis a winter night we live in, and the dawn is long, long delayed. Sorrow and crime and lust are rampant through the night, and here and there a weary traveller lights a torch, and would exclaim as Vitellius of old, *Illuxit*. Dawn is here. But there is still the one star guiding, ever guiding; it shines farther than the rest; yet more clearly. And the fallow fields are waiting, but there is no pause for the night. Soon mayhap will the message of a song ruffle the deep tarns and chide the birds to emulation; soon will a ray of light rest on that snow-clad mountain peak: soon will the chorale of gladness arrive with blushing dawn.

ROY."

It is only just that his own view of this charge of invertebracy should be recorded. It would appear to be the first cry of pain, not, as careless readers might

suppose, of wounded conceit, but of that deeper, most forgivable anguish which comes to out-of-the-way natures, when others take them awry. An attentive ear can catch in this letter one of the dominant chords in his short life. His intense family affection was equalled by a passionate loyalty to his chosen friends: and though, as the above letter shows, he could be exceedingly vigorous in self-defence, the real strain came when home-love and friendship clashed, and clashed over religion. At the end of the Trinity term of 1904, sometime in June, Flecker wrote the following letter:—

"My dear Mother,

I must confess myself somewhat appalled by your letter. So J. is not to be admitted because he is not a Christian! I do not mind his not coming and the missing of the pleasure it would give me. But I am awfully grieved that you should possess such mediæval ideas, and hope you will forgive me, if I put the matter in its true light. First of all you say you could not have anyone who was 'against Christ and His teaching' as a guest. Whoever said J. was 'against' Christ?

All that he would tell you is that he had no settled convictions. And in the name of sense how can anyone have any settled convictions before they are about twenty? A genius like he is can scarcely accept things on tradition: he must *read*, and he has never yet had time to read both or even one side of the question. But, if there is anything of which he is persuaded it is of the beauty and truth of a great part of Christ's teaching. We claim Christ for man, as being the noblest, finest man that ever lived.

Where, then, is your Evangelical spirit? You have an opportunity of converting, by reasoning, one who, if converted, would become an archbishop! . . .

Of course, J. would come to church, and would be the last man in the world to make a parade of his beliefs. He is the most silent and reserved of men.

No! in the true spirit of the great preacher of Tolerance, you would not mind if I brought over an absolute ignoramus like—well, A., who has never thought for himself in his life, but would be pleased to go to church and is a Christian because his father went to church and had morning prayers just in the same way: while if I had a conceited idiot like —— (good heavens! the man does think a lot of his half-dozen last-century ideas—and I had him to breakfast last term)—if I wanted to bring him over what rejoicings there would be! And so he would come, and smile a donnish smile,

and patronise you all with his what-a-fine-thing-it-was-for-you-all-that-I-was-here sort of air, and there would have been delight in the family of Flecker.

O ye stars! What queer Christians we have. —— is a fine fellow entirely ruined by plain religious mania; B., who has had five shots at Mods., Lord ——, pleased at being *the* Christian scientific man, Bishops,— how many of them believe in the divinity of Christ?—have half the love of Him that J. has? Enfin, S. with no ideas beyond his turkeys and the Evangelical Party.

No! you do not admire intellect, or refinement. You would admit Kensit and turn out Huxley. Yet, Solomon of old seemed to think it worth acquiring, and *Christ* said 'Wisdom is justified of *all* her children.'

J. works because he loves work and it is his duty. Everything he does he does well.

Only one Christian at Oxford have I ever met whom I love and respect. He's a Martyrs' man, and a Keswickite and a scholar, and I got to know him through J.

Please show father the letter. I should be surprised if he is not of the same mind as I am in some things. Forgive me for saying what I think.

Your loving son,

Roy."

That this particular friendship was obsessing and intimate is indicated by these extracts from a letter which Flecker wrote to his father soon after:—

"I am in a terrible state of suspense. J. has been in for the Hertford, and the results will be out to-morrow, I expect. If he does not get it, I shall be awfully sorry: if he does not get a mention, I shall be unhappy for a month.

He is a strange mystery, is J. I wish you could see him. . . . He is far away the most interesting fellow I ever met in my life: he is the only man now living that I can think of whose intellect makes me feel ashamed, and calls up all admiration of which I am capable, and next to dear old Cyril, he is the closest friend I have.

Really, life will begin to be worth living again at the Varsity next term, when both Cyril and J. are with me. . . . I am not going to ask you to have him over at all. I leave that to your suggestion—at the end of the vac. perhaps, not before, as you have had enough to bother you in all conscience for the last year."

This divergence of view had come gradually. Before the June letter about his friend's tabooed visit, Flecker had written to his friend Sedgwick, in May, this casual

sentence, at the end of a letter about examinations and literature, suggested possibly by a reference to Renan :—

"I am just going to write to my father professing agnosticism, and cutting the last thread of the double life."

This letter, like many to his father, was not preserved. But a letter which appears to be Dr. Flecker's reply has been found :—

"My dear Roy,

I send you a few books. I have re-read your letter of last Saturday. Very possibly the men whom you mention did not believe in the Divinity of Christ. When men of large intellectual power stray from their own particular sphere, they make astounding mistakes.

Theology is an abstruse science. Outside the ranks of theologians (and such they were not) an ordinary man, anxious to find out the truth, has as much, nay more, chance of finding it, than a man whose strong intellect enslaves him. Christ Himself is very clear on this. The doctrine shall be revealed to those who are prepared to do the will. So that if a man—if you—should take the Beatitudes as the law of life and determinedly obey them, the question of dogma might wait.

As for scientific men, they seem altogether to have lost all claim to be leaders. They tear each other's theories to pieces, they intrude on each other's domains, and make themselves ridiculous. It is this which made me proof against them. I believe that Karl Pearson who is *facile princeps* in his own line has shown that the great Haeckel talks absolute nonsense again and again.

And Kelvin riddles him through and through on *his* own ground. The trend of the best scientific thought during the last ten years has distinctly been against the attitude of 25 years ago, 'miracles are impossible.'

Your loving Father.

It seems to me equally unnecessary to allow either B. on the one hand, or the Camp Evangelicals on the other to influence you.

There is a stiff book of Ward's on *Naturalism and Agnosticism* worth reading."

Flecker's answer, if he made one, is not to be found. The great event, for him, of 1904, was his examination, Honour Mods. Early in the year he wrote to his father in anything but an optimistic strain about the examination while preserving personal lightheartedness :—

"I try to write in a pleasant spirit, but what with Mods.

approaching and a horrid sore throat, I find it hard. . . . *Re* my future prospects. I have unbounded confidence :

(*a*) In a faculty of getting myself pleasantly or unpleasantly known anywhere.

(*b*) In certain literary abilities I possess.

(*c*) In Fate.

(*d*) In ideals,

and thus, I leave the matter to settle itself. I am sure I shall find out somehow whether I am to be Vice-Chancellor of the University, Viceroy of India, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Ambassador in Paris, Archbishop of Canterbury, a second Shakespeare—or Napoleon, or Ruskin, but, at all events, will ever remain,

Your loving son,

Roy.

H. E. Flecker. His ——— mark."

He was looking beyond impending Mods., to Greats, and beyond, again, to his professional future. In the last letter to his mother in the Hilary term of 1904, he wrote :—

"Please tell father I am quite decided not to schoolmaster unless by some absurd fluke I get a first in Greats. If I get a second I shall cram for Home Civil."

It will be remembered that in a letter from Bryn Cyfing, in the Easter vacation, Flecker, totting up his joys, observed "pleasant to have no care and yet be working." The "care" came very soon. It was in the Trinity term of 1904 that he wrote from the Union Society to both his parents at once, as follows :—

"I sit down to pen you one of the most crushing blows that has ever befallen me—or you. I have got a third in Mods.! I could scarcely believe it when I saw the list. No one in Trinity has got a first. There are three seconds.

Yet in no way does my conscience prick me. I worked conscientiously—only in one paper do I feel I could have done better with more work. The fact must be that my ability in comps. and verses has entirely failed.

What am I to do? This only stirs me to new exertion—but all the dreams I had formed of a life of study are gone. I must work and cram for the I.C.S. or something.

Only let me stay at Oxford till I have taken the Taylorian. What Blakiston will say I don't know. He will probably dock my schol. And he expected five firsts.

Anyhow, this last vac. closes to me for three years, at least, that education in poetry and literature and research I longed for—and now for a cram. I *did* expect a second.

Yours in vast disappointment,
ROY."

Depressed by this failure Flecker went, in the Long vacation of 1904, to Lausanne, while the rest of his family spent it at Chamonix. It is not surprising that his surroundings jarred on him. He described the company in his *Pension* as dull, almost entirely feminine. At one moment he wrote petulantly, "I am the only male in the Pension." But when he was not, things were no better; "I am awfully sick," he wrote, "of going about by myself, and still more tired of the German student." There had been some idea of his taking a summer "course"; but having inspected its possibilities he spurned it as "a waste of time and money."

It was his own doing that he was at Lausanne, away from his family party at Chamonix. He refused to go with them: then, when all their arrangements were made, he was disappointed that there was no room for him. The fact is mainly worth recording because it puts him definitely in that small company, of all times and places, who expect things to come right, however few or whatever contrary plans they themselves make. Flecker always tended to expect "things" to right themselves, even to suit any complete and abrupt change he might make. The sagacious and prudent are often vexed when this peculiar kind of improvidence is justified, as it is occasionally, of its child.

Soon he revolted altogether against Lausanne, and clamoured to join the family. In reply to mild dissuasion he wrote impetuously:—

"I don't care if Chamonix is as flat as a pancake. I want to work and to be with someone. . . . There are three reasons only why I want to come to Chamonix—

(1) To have a companion.
(2) To have you[1] as a companion.
(3) To be *en famille*, and I want to discuss prospects."

[1] The letter was addressed to his father.

When the family did not at once give way, Flecker reiterated his wish to come, though in doing so he spoke of Chamonix as "a little rat trap, from what I have heard." In this disturbance of his wishes he harked back to the old contention about his friendships, and tried to show why he had originally gone to Lausanne, namely to avoid term-time at Dean Close, whose terms naturally did not coincide with Oxford's :—

"Can you wonder that I prefer the society of my friends when the vac. falls in term-time? With everyone busy and worried, without having the time or capacity for assisting: sitting gloomily working in my room all the morning, my greatest treat being a game of tennis or football with the boys? . . . Last Easter was the jolliest holiday I have ever had—especially the week with Cyril.

Then, I have a friend with a big brain and a slender body, whom I want to teach to swim and ride and become strong, and also to give him some chance of a good healthy outdoor life and of seeing some fine country, and forsooth this friend may not enter the Precinct because he is not going to be an Evangelical parson, while any fool I cared to bring would be welcome—for you have been very kind about inviting my friends—provided that I assured you he went to church. He is a little bit selfish, very impulsive, not very serious about anything but his work, quite capable of being led into all sorts of things, but it is for this very reason that I like to keep a continual eye on him, and put him in the company of Cyril, if possible, and so forth."

In an effort to make Lausanne a little more tolerable, Flecker buried himself more and more in literature. He mentioned that he had bought the Tauchnitz Swinburne, adding, "It contains the substance of two vols., and Swinburne is my favourite poet." No one, reading his letters, can fail to notice changes not only in opinions which sometimes he tempestuously declared would never alter, but also in his poetical allegiances. At one time this man, and at another that, is proclaimed his favourite poet. This is neither levity nor the development common to all literary minds, but rather a sign of his peculiar, open-minded enthusiasm, ever ready to

welcome a fresh outlook: a temper which he kept to the end of his life.

After the Long vacation of 1904, Flecker returned to Oxford to read for Greats. Sometime during 1905, he wrote to his mother, with some intimately personal touches:—

"Somebody, I don't know who, wanted to know who that 'saturnine oriental' was the other day! Mrs. Walker has expressed her opinion to J. that my looks are improving, and that I have got beautiful eyes.[1] I would rather be told I had beautiful eyes than that I pulled all the wires in the University."

Writing in the same letter about a friend, he revealed a more serious trait than a desire for beautiful eyes:—

"Breakfasted with N. F. this morning. He has a new white overcoat which is the most vivid thing in Oxford. It came from Malta, and is greyish-white like a blanket and cost 18s. only. If only Miss S. would bring me one over! They are magnificent. Everyone stares, little boys say, 'Yah! Dressing-gown!' and so forth. N. cares not at all. He never cares what other people say. Would I could add 'ni moi non plus.' Greetings to all. Tell Claire not to think herself superior to me, because she knows Anglo-Saxon and reads Wordsworth."

In a similar strain, in a birthday letter to his other sister, he wrote about her quite different tastes:—

"It is always quite impossible to know what to send you. I suppose what you would really like is Murray's *Anatomy*, or a treatise on Conic Sections. I nearly forgot your birthday in the strain of packing, which was very horrid of me: but why can't you keep yours in a respectable month in winter like the other members of the family?

So all I could do was to choose you a book from my shelves: now this is in German, and I'm afraid it will be too hard for you to read, but you may look at the pretty pictures if you're good."

It is remarkable that Flecker should, so far as is now known, have written so few letters from Oxford on his literary interests and views. Among his home letters

[1] This recalls an episode of his very early childhood. He was out one day in Cheltenham with his mother. After straying a few yards he ran up to her saying, "That lady said I had such beautiful eyes. Have I, mother?"

few, indeed, refer to this, his main concern in life. He was writing verse abundantly, and some poetry, as the publication of *The Bridge of Fire*, in 1907, proved. He was perpetrating literary jeux-d'esprit, at the expense of all and sundry, some of which, later on, saw the light in *The Best Man*. Others, such as occasional skits on vulnerable dons and other great persons, were sagaciously circulated only among the elect.

All kinds of nonsense rimes of that Limerick variety in which he had always excelled poured from his pen. One of these, with two variants, was sent, after his death, to his mother by one of these trusted Oxford friends, Mr. Swithinbank. Writing in 1920 from Burmah, the latter said :—

"I believe I never saw him (though I heard from him once or twice) after he went to Cambridge. . . . To me, he was just a pleasant, amusing companion, with whom one could (and often did) spend a whole day, talking about books, people, and sheer nonsense. He was famous for composing preposterous verses, which somehow made one laugh and stuck in one's head. You, no doubt, know—

I am confidential adviser
To the Kaiser,
Which is rather a crusher
For the Czar of Russia.

The original text of the last two lines was—

Which is rather a jar
For the Czar.

I liked some of his serious verse, but did not in those days take him very seriously, as a poet or otherwise : it wasn't till I read his *Grecians* that I realised what a lot of sense there was in him."

By far the most brilliant of all these jests, which now exist, is the extravagantly clever nonsense which he and a friend published in Eights Week of 1906. It was called *The Best Man*. Its vivid scarlet cover bore a fantastic solid black figure, with a face cleverly contrived with a thin black outline and a few facial touches in the red.

Of the contents of this ephemeral publication, now

almost forgotten, and of which but a few copies exist, not many were republished. *Oxford Canal* appeared in *Thirty-six Poems*, again in *Forty-two Poems*, and may be found now in a somewhat shorter form than in *The Best Man*. Should this fantastic jest ever be republished intact, some may wonder why the excised lines, so touched with his fantastic humour, so integral a part of the original poem's uncanny horror, should have been omitted. It was in *The Best Man* that the poem, *I have Sung all Love's Great Songs* appeared first. There was also one, *Roses and Rain*, inspired, perhaps, by the rose-garden at Dean Close School, which has not reappeared; and another set of verses, farcical, grim, and clever, called *Aunt Murder*. There were, besides, some nonsense rhymes, original and bizarre, specially one about that decorous Poetess Mrs. Hemans. Most interesting of all was the first sketch of his rather gruesome *The Last Generation*, which was eventually published, lengthened and vastly improved, in 1908, in paper covers, by the *New Age Press*, and which now may be found in Flecker's *Collected Prose*, published in 1920.

Though throughout these Oxford years Flecker was undoubtedly writing much, the only letters on literary subjects which have been saved seem to have been addressed to his old Uppingham friend, Sedgwick. Some have been lost or destroyed: these which have been saved, and which by permission of several persons concerned can be quoted, tell something of his reading, tastes, work, and hopes from 1902 to 1905. The first was written the day after the first birthday he spent at Oxford:—

"Trin. Coll.,
Oxford,
Nov. 6th, 1902.

Dear Sedgwick,

A strange thing, indeed, to reply so soon to your excellent letter. There is therein much sound advice, for which I am duly grateful. I am, true, far too apt to chatter with familiarity. Rather, I was. Uppingham showed me the inanity of chattering. Long and

delightful experience has showed me the value of true familiarity, or rather of friendship. An unemotional character like yourself, could never, I believe, contract friendships as I do. I have two such friends, and may possibly add two more to the list. But not for a long time. I expect a great deal, you see. Friendship should never be one-sided. Moreover, it should be of such a character that it never palls: of such a character that the longer it lasts the firmer it becomes. I claim for myself, nowadays, to be, in the choice of my friends, infallible. It is a curious thing for one who has formed such worthless acquaintances in time past.

It is for this same reason that our styles in writing are so different. I have my own opinion about Carlyle. I think his style is the style of genius, inferior only to Ruskin's. The style of Burke and Macaulay is the style of talented mediocrity. It is very imitable. My style is, I hope, not imitated but natural.

You are mistaken when you say that on occasion I believe myself to be evangelical. I hate (no slighter word will suffice) all Church divisions, and all divisions into sects. If, however, you mean by Evangelical fond of Mission-work, I reply that I believe I have, as every man has, a mission in life to fulfil, about which I hold a high ideal. I do *not* think it is an O.U.I.C.C.U. sort of mission. Ruskinian rather. With your remark about Chapel, I heartily agree, though I have a great dislike for the ineffectual and obsolete gabble of the Prayer Book. (What would my dear Sire say? He is publishing a book thereon, and loves it!)

Backbone, you talk of: in verse. What *is* backbone in verse? Careful composition or careful revision? There is a man here who writes excellent sonnets. He takes a thought and rounds it off and elaborates it and turns out the complete article like a copy of Latin verse. He writes very good sonnets, but will never rise above the level of sonnets. He is a good critic of my poetry, discovering absurdities that I should never have found out. But he will never be a Keats or a Shelley. I intend to be, if poetry can work a mission. But I fear prose only can appeal to this age—prose and doggerel, that is to say. Is it not appalling that the only verse that can appeal to this appalling and degenerate age is the Kipling slang?

But whatever you do, don't call me Evangelical. I am neither Evangelical nor High Church, nor Methodist, nor Roman Catholic, nor Rechabite, nor Perizzite, nor Baptist, nor Sectarianist, but purely, plainly and simply, a Christian.

Am I to hope for a quick reply? I suppose I dare not, but I think this epistle requires it. A photograph, I think, was also promised. To-day I play fives. By the way, the Winchester game suits me better than the Eton game.

Excuse this weird paper, and numbering of pages. This is

written during an incomprehensible logic lecture—which is wicked but explanatory—on provided cooking paper. Be not insulted. Adieu.

Yours very sincerely,
H. Roy Flecker."[1]

The next is short :—

"Trinity College,
Oxford.

May 23rd, 1903.

And wherefore, O Theophilus, thus dilatory? Send likewise a presentment of features.

Have no reply to your rude neat lines save Limerick written by base athlete in our house—effective, despite halt in fourth line. I modify the expressions. . . . Forgive me, lines not by me—interesting specimen of crude effectiveness of base athlete.

Read Webster, dramatist not poet. Have rid myself of old curse—unperception of character. Am becoming *noted* for flash-light character drawing! Mankind thus becomes an interesting puzzle competition!

My latest effervescence is a suggestion—that *sunt lacrimæ rerum* is a mistranslation of some Alexandrian poet!

Bold enough to be true!

Why not meet at Colwyn Bay Camp? Don't know if I can get there myself, but can try.

Must now end owing to stoppage of music.

Yours very sincerely,
H. E. Flecker."[1]

The next followed close on the heels of the last :—

"Trinity College,
Oxford.
May, 1903.

Dear Sedgwick,

Many thanks for your last letter. The Germans never stop talking, they surely talk nonsense, they don't eat more than I do: my Germans kept no cats: but always shouted instead of talking, and were rude to one another.

I learn German, as you say, thinking of the Civil Service: but as my ideas of the future are very vague, and my temper restless, I don't think I shall ever do anything half so steady as that. I want to learn German because Germany has a fine literature, and because the Germans are a fine people, and because classics waste time.

You seem to think I dislike classical education. You are mistaken: I find it quite entertaining, but am absolutely convinced that it is so much time, to a great extent, wasted.

[1] Kindly lent by Messrs. W. H. Heffer, Cambridge.

My ideas are not all the outcome of Germany. My view is entirely contrary to that of all other opponents of classical education, in that I think that it ought to be to some small extent preserved at school as a mental training: (Verse composition is one of the finest trainings in existence), but abolished in the University (except as a speciality), because at the undergraduate age one should have attained self-consciousness. As for what classical literature has done for me—well, it is only just now that I am thrusting off its unmanly despondency.

Take three of the world's greatest poets—Shakespeare, Goethe, and Keats. *Not one of them knew any classics*, getting all their knowledge from translation.

It is *classics* that we want to assign to its proper pigeon-hole.

I am going to talk against Socialism here in the Union on Thursday.

Yes, Ruskin and Kingsley are the two men that have always appealed to me most. I am trying in a way to shake off the influence of Ruskin from me, as it was getting dangerous. He is far too excitable, and his character was not very strong.

Kingsley, as represented in that magnificent book, *Two Years Ago*, appeals to me more especially; because here is preached that healthy manliness which I have been striving for during the last year and find it still hard to attain. After all, I am only eighteen as yet, only a school-boy still. . . .

I am trying hard to believe in Kingsley on Christianity, and at all events to live as Kingsley lived, an upright, open-air, literary, educated life. George Borrow is another man who appeals to me very strongly.

I should not think that King's Chapel was immensely superior to Magdalen. I have heard just the reverse from unprejudiced people: I expect they are about on a level.

I am hoping to be invited to Liverpool next vac., so I may see you there; I want to very much. Am playing Fives, Lacrosse, and Soccer. Well, the paper ends, and so must your very sincere friend,

H. E. Flecker.

Can you answer me on classical education?"[1]

Some ten months separate the next letter from the last:—

"Trinity College, Oxford,
March 14th, 1904.

Dear Sedgwick,

Thursday week, I hope to be amid the Welsh mountains. I am going with J., the senior Balliol scholar of this year. We are

[1] Kindly lent by Messrs. W. H. Heffer and Co., Cambridge.

going to stay in a cottage kept by an old lady and not spend more than £1 a week each. We shall be working for at least six hours a day each, as he is going in for a University scholarship. Or rather he will work, and I shall write and read as well as work, being somewhat exhausted after Mods., which is now 'on.'

I wonder what you would think of J. He is an encyclopædia, but a fascinating one. He reminds me of Shelley, as portrayed by Hogg, especially when he lies on the hearth-rug, his head almost in the fire, with his long light hair, slight frame and pensive face. The description sounds as if out of a novel, does it not? Indeed, such a fellow is not often to be met with outside of a novel or romance. He is shy, free from all touch of conceit and healthy-minded withal, with a voice like a bell.

To meet whom, I would you could come to Capel: but I conclude from your silence that it may not be.

To sum him up, he is very like E., only more so, without the cynicism. I met him first in S.'s rooms.

Another friend of mine whom I am far surer you would like is H. He is an Eton man, the fourth Trinity scholar of my year. He is large, solid, imperturbable, and lazy: in his grey eyes are libraries of humanity and mirth. His great charm is his talking, which is slow and deliberate. The least jest of his is most marvellously funny from his lips. He is a true aristocrat, cousin of Lord G., etc., etc., a fact it would be unnecessary to mention, were it not that he possesses all the peculiar virtues of the English nobility, with none of their vices. I have never heard him laughed at, never heard anyone talk ill of him. He is a friend of young S. and knows Uppingham well.

His bent is not so much to poetry as to art, social history and problems, and Church questions, in which, though an agnostic, he takes great interest. I know you would like him because I never met anyone who disliked him and have met many that know him. He represents sensible refinement and true broad-mindedness to a wonderful degree.

It might interest you to know that I have at length definitely become an agnostic, with a firm belief in the immortality of the soul. I feel bound to reject Christianity, not so much from the improbabilities of Bible narrative, although it is very doubtful, of course, that Christ Himself claimed to be more than man (see *Erehwon Revisited* by Butler, for an amusing account of the growth of a false worship), as by a feeling that its ideals are not the highest possible, *e.g.*, justification by faith, the system of reward and punishment, the excessive altruism, precluding strength of character, etc. Charles Kingsley is not so true a type of Christian as S. Francis of Assisi. I have been reading Max Nordau's *Degeneration*,

a splendid work, very mistaken in parts, but wholesome as an antidote; Whistler's *Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, a most amusing and vigorous book; Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol*, very powerful in parts, have you read it? *The Hobby Horse* (Pinero), *Monna Vanna* by Maeterlinck. *Resurrection*—what do you think of it? I cannot endure the idiotic ideas on social matters. *Widowers' Houses* (Bernard Shaw). *Sartor Resartus*, a wonderful work of a wonderful age, that I am re-reading with much pleasure; *Savonarola, or a City's Tragedy*, a new play very good in parts; *Snake Worship*, an interesting book somewhat old now, Herrick, and many others.

Please send me some of your poetry, as you once promised, and write me,

Yours very sincerely,

H. E. Flecker, goes down."

The next letter, among other things, announces to Sedgwick Flecker's great disappointment over Mods. :—

"Oxford Union Society,

May, 1904.

Dear Sedgwick,

In the hope of hearing from you again, I write; but stress of time compels me to be brief and hurried. I was very sorry indeed to hear of your accident. I hope you have entirely recovered.

We had—at least I know I had—the pleasantest and most useful vac. or holiday of my life. It would take too long to tell of our wanderings . . . of a three miles' ride at a rattling pace over the sands, of Red Wharf Bay, with the wind behind us, of how we stayed with my friend, Cyril Roberts, in Mid-Wales, at the cottage I once tried to get you to come to, and cooked our own food—how we ran short of cash and borrowed (and repaid) £1 off the postman: how I cycled back against the wind—and how we worked and read. Chiefly of all, I learnt what work really is.

J. is said to be the cleverest fellow that has been in Oxford for the last ten years. I doubt the truth of that, but he does know how to work!

All of which pleasantness ended abruptly on my return to Oxford, and on the discovery that I had got a third in Mods., and now it remains a memory that gets ever more romantically misty the further I retreat.

How I managed to get a third I don't know. It was not lack of work—things I worked at hardest I got γ's for. My unseen, my pride! scored a β. My comps. were all bad, except the one that was ever accounted worst—Greek iambics—one that I all but dropped—which got a $\beta+$.

The reason, I expect, is that finding me woefully given to inaccuracy, whenever I attempted style, they sniffed for hedging.

And the examiners have been unusually severe this year. I am now combating inaccuracy: fortunately it is not so grave a fault in Greats.

'Greats' is in a way the finest exam. there is. It consists of two parts, history and philosophy, as perhaps you know. Though I hate philosophy, it is excellent mental training, and my historical essays have been received with approbation. I am carefully pruning my style, reserving outbursts for verse!

Moreover, I am going in for the Taylorian, an exam. which gives good certificates in French. So I am really reading double: and very hard work it is.

I have then ceased reading English literature—except that *Sartor Resartus* is my bible—when weary—and read nothing but French literature for recreation—of which I have purchased a vast quantity—and books that lie within the scope of Greats work. It has been said well that the aim of education is to know something about everything and everything about something. Greats secures the first part—and also the second—for I am taking up a non-obligatory special subject, the fascinating Mycenean Age. So I am really reading treble.

Have you read *The Golden Bough?* (Frazer of your Trinity), I expect you have. It is a marvellous combination of delightful, often humorous style, with vast erudition: and it has been said that no one has a right to have an opinion on religion till they have read it. I am also reading Renan, *Life of Christ*, and several French books. Renan's style is lovely.

I am just going to write to my father professing agnosticism, and cutting the last thread of the double life.

Yours very sincerely,
H. E. Flecker."[1]

The next letter is interesting as it appears to contain the drafts of two poems, in an early, if not their earliest form, one at least of which has since been published, as an example of images which recur often in his later work:—

"July, 1904.

Dear Sedgwick,

Have no time to write a proper letter: I merely send you two 'copies' to be candidly criticised. They are typed on my new type-writer.

I am engaged for two weeks, trying to get a youth through 'Smalls.' He can't spell pretty (*priety* is his version) and does not know his regular verbs.

[1] Kindly lent by Messrs. W. H. Heffer and Co., Cambridge.

I have almost given up hope of ever seeing you again. We are going to Switzerland in August.

I parted from J. last Monday, after having seen him almost every day ever since I first met him in March. I am so fond of him that it is hard to be philosophical, having exchanged his society for the society of a country vicarage. Yours very sincerely,

H. E. FLECKER.

Please let me have something of yours.

Lucretia has been revised from end to end after a study of blank verse.

Launch the galley, sailors bold!
Prowed with silver, sharp and cold:
Winged with silk and oared with gold.
Silver stream in violet night;
Silken clouds in soft moonlight;
Golden stars in shadowy height.
Stars and stream are under cloud;
Sinks the galley, silver prowed,
Silver sails become a shroud.

. . . . . .

Not the night of her wild hair,
Nor the star-sparkle of her eye,
Leave me in so deep despair
As a voice that will not die,
Saying with a simple sigh
"Good-bye!"
Minstrels in the moving air
Came with white wings sailing nigh;
Very wonderful they were
Making magic melody
Of a woman's lonely sigh
"Good-bye!"[1]

The next, written from Cheltenham during the Long vacation of 1904, has much of interest in it:—

"Dean Close School,
Cheltenham,
Sept. 24th, 1904.

Dear Sedgwick,

I should like to hear from you again, not having heard for a long time—that is, if you are not too busy.

I have been for six weeks in Switzerland,[2] which I did not enjoy anything like so much as my stay in Wales last Easter, which

[1] Kindly lent by Messrs. W. H. Heffer and Co., Cambridge.

[2] *I.e.*, first at Lausanne: afterwards, with the rest of the family, at Chamonix.

was, indeed, the best time I have ever had. But, of course, Switzerland, seen under whatever drawbacks of tourists and solitude, is an opener of the eyes to the Nature lover.

I will not regale you with an exhaustive list of books read; truly I am beginning to tire of books and ideas, and long for a little action and life instead: so are you I feel sure. But I strongly recommend Morley's *Voltaire* to you, if you have not read it: also Grant Allen's *Evolution of the Idea of God* (published for 6*d.* by the admirable Rationalist Press Association). I am wading through Haeckel. For metaphysicians who have come into my studies I have already conceived a wondering contempt. Then I have read all sorts of French books, having become a hater of their classics, and a great admirer of their surprising nineteenth century poets. Of Théophile Gautier I am particularly fond. But the French seem to have lost for ever the broadmindedness of Rabelais.

I strongly recommend the modern English poet, Francis Thompson, to your notice, as being remarkable, if not quite healthy.

I confess that every book I read seems to make the return to Christianity an absolute impossibility. I rather incline to Haeckel's Monism, but I haven't mastered it yet. What puzzles me is how to find a basis for morality at all.

At present, I find myself absolutely without a conscience, except a vague desire for my own and other people's betterment, which is, I suppose, the natural result of large doses of Bible, Carlyle, and Ruskin.

What makes me marvel is that any sane man can believe in Christianity: what makes me annoyed is the way clever men temporise with it, looking upon it as a philosophy, as a fulfilment of Plato, as an interesting relic of mediævalism not to be disturbed, as a refuge from despair very convenient for the lower classes, as anything in fact but truth or a lie.

And the hopeless quibbles and shiftings!

What are you going to do in life? If only I knew. I don't want to have to go into the Civil Service. All my sympathies, all my hopes are to be a headmaster of a school of my own. You will be surprised, perhaps, to hear this, after knowing me at Uppingham; but I have nevertheless a fairly good knowledge of the human boy, and am even capable of keeping him in order. And I have an entire scheme of education: of course, immature as yet, but different to all others. I will not dilate on it, simply saying that its main idea is to make each boy 'know something about everything, and everything about something.'

But where shall I get the money? And, as I refuse to teach Christianity, whence shall I draw pupils? Yet I am sure it is the one thing I am really fit for.

Oxford and Oxford friends are so delightful, yet ever there seems to be a skeleton at the feast, asking 'What will you do, living and dead?' As John Morley says of Voltaire's age, so I would say of the mad joyousness and 'cleverness' of modern literature and art—that it hides a feeling of awful despair at the questions that have to be solved. The passion of Kingsley and Ruskin has given way to the cynicism of Frank Stockton and the clever sentimentalism of Le Gallienne—not because the 'problems' are solved, but because they are unsolvable. For a fine contrast of the nineteenth and twentieth century spirits, see Chesterton's *Watts*.

Excuse my rambling. I do wish you would send me some of your verse. I have never seen any. *Lucretia* has been most carefully revised with J.'s aid—who knows all about blank verse: I am beginning to think it rather rubbish. I am most successful at translating lyrics.

I have been sufficiently egotistical: but as I have described myself, so do you describe yourself.

Ever yours,
H. E. Flecker."[1]

The remaining letter of this series was written at the end of Flecker's last Long vacation of his Oxford days:—

"Dean Close School,
Cheltenham,
Sept. 18th, 1905.

Dear Sedgwick,

You send me a slightly more reasonable letter, which I can answer, perhaps, with less flourish and more sense. I will not trouble to answer passages of mere vituperation, the value of which you yourself know. But I wish you would refrain, as a mere point of decency and style, from criticising people by epithets. I am aware that I do the same thing myself, but it is a great fault. As John Morley says, the English people always believe that a thing is stated convincingly if it is stated strongly. Your style reminds me of Max Nordau's in *Degeneration*—*e.g.*, of Ibsen's *Ghosts*, this sort of style: 'The mawkish curate then engages in a long drivelling conversation with his fool of a daughter'; or, again, of Maeterlinck: 'It is beneath the dignity of an educated man to criticise the productions of a delirious maniac!' You talk exactly like this. Can you not say the 'somewhat commonplace verse of Stephen Phillips'? It would be better and far truer than calling it flabby nonsense, which it is not.

Then, again, you trot forth the 'suffocating windbags of

[1] Kindly lent by Messrs. W. H. Heffer and Co., Cambridge.

Swinburne,' and say you prefer Tennyson. To argue this ancient point would be tedious. I think you know very little about poetry or criticism: cannot you know yourself enough to see that? By your phrase I suppose you to deny Swinburne the qualities of dignity, lucidity, and depth. Have you ever read anything of his outside the first volume of *Poems and Ballads?* Have you studied *Mater Triumphalis*, perhaps the most dignified and majestic lyric ever written; or *Hertha*, the true sense of which it would tax a keener intellect than yours to discover. Only Browning has ever made his words mean so much; and, in prose, Meredith.

I am very fond of Tennyson and read him. There is much pleasant music: I am especially fond of the *Lotus Eaters* and *Maeldune*. But as he himself admitted, he has nothing to say. Neither his language nor his music, nor his intellect, nor his spiritual exaltation can be compared to Swinburne's. His stories are commonplace and pretty: *In Memoriam* is almost the worst thing he ever wrote.

But I am only too glad that you should prefer Lamb to Chesterton, though I do not think anyone of any judgment would be fool enough not to do so. Have you read Walter Pater's wonderful criticism of Lamb in his *Appreciations?* De Quincey, too, excellent; but how you would have declaimed against him had you been his contemporary!

Scott, too, I am still reading Scott. I have just been reading again the *Bride of Lammermoor* and *Redgauntlet*—about the best. Have you seen Swinburne's splendid eulogy of Scott in the preface to his new novel?

But there are modern novels that one may read—novels that are by no means the work of diseased brains separating themselves from the world. I presume you have read *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Though Thomas Hardy is not so great as Scott, yet *Tess* is the finest novel in the English language: for Scott, as F. says, must be judged *en masse*.

I suppose you have read Meredith's *Egoist*. Did you not find your own character reflected in the hero's? I did. There are few novels to compare with Meredith's. If you want substance and thought, try and read his poetry.

I suppose you think that anyone so pre-occupied with literature cannot take any interest in every-day affairs. I venture to think that I am as much in touch with them as you are. True, I never venture to talk politics, because I am not sufficiently conceited to imagine that I know anything about them.

To me Motor-Car Acts, Old Age Pensions, the Reform of the Roads seem to be far more important than Protection, Boer Wars, Relations with Morocco, or Home Rule. 'One man, one vote'

seems to me delirious nonsense. Education seems to be about the most important of all things.

I have studied what a town might be in Berlin, where there is, indeed, no taste for art, but, better still, there are no slums. I talk with people in railway carriages, especially artisans from Liverpool, Manchester, or London. They usually talk about Watts' pictures, about Haeckel or Emerson. Our upper classes have ceased to read: our lower classes read vigorously, especially R.P.A. publications. The reason why I hate our system of games is because they choke off real athletics altogether. I who write to you in defence of not being commonplace am a bore to some of my more literary friends. I try to make them learn to swim, to ride the bicycle, to play tennis, and objurgate them for Swinburne-mania. I force them to take daily exercise, and to be healthy. You have never cycled 160 miles in a day—I have. I scarcely ever spend a day without exercise: I have walked up many mountains in Scotland. Do not imagine, pray, that I feed on poetry. My appetite is enormous. Write again if you will: cela m'amuse.

Yours ever,
H. E. Flecker."[1]

It is a pity that the rest of his Oxford letters to Mr. Sedgwick are no longer in existence, but even these few help materially towards understanding Flecker's outlook at Oxford. Anyone acquainted with young people knows that they can and do make confidences to elder people, and that such can be deep and sincere. But to chosen friends of its own age and standing, Youth writes or speaks with a frankness, an *abandon*, and a fearlessness of seeming conceited or unduly dogmatic which altogether go a long way towards supplying the necessary materials for a complete picture. It will be observed that there is, in these letters, no trace of morbidity, of "decadence," to use once more that ubiquitous word of conveniently undefined content. There are, on the other hand, clear statements that he detected signs of unhealthiness in some members of his circle, and did not shrink, if necessary, from making himself a nuisance to them in his efforts to get them out of posing, self-indulgence, and other forms of unwholesome folly.

[1] Kindly lent by Messrs. W. H. Heffer and Co., Cambridge.

As the end of his Oxford time drew near, Flecker's mood was one of uneasiness. This is shown in one of his last letters to his mother, in which he said :—

"Why should you think I am worried over anything in particular? I should have thought that Greats and a misty future were sufficient."

When he had taken Greats, but before the results were known, at a moment when some tiresome chickens were coming home to roost, he wrote uneasily to his father :—

"It is rather difficult to know exactly what to write. It is extremely kind of you to offer to help me, but I cannot, of course, as you will see, expect or desire you to pay for expenses which are entirely my own fault, and my own concern ; and for which I offer no excuse, except that I was relying on writing, and on the money I got for *John Davidson* and so forth ; and most (not all) of the expenses were incurred during my third year. . . .

As for the Home Civil and so forth, I purpose this :—

I will get a tutorship next year, work for the English Literature School, and look about for some sort of permanent appointment. Unless something that both of us approve turns up, I will then immediately cram for the Home Civil at Wren's. I will try and get a foreign tutorship to keep up French and German.

I am sensible that this is rather a frigid letter under the circumstances, but it is a business letter, and I wanted to make things clear. As I told Mother, I was prepared to face my own debts, and had not the remotest intention of troubling you about them. . . . I am sorry—especially as you have been so kind to me. I was very touched by Mother's coming up because she thought I was worrying. I was not worried about debts, but about life, which is a more serious thing—but she seemed so bent on my making a revelation that I had to.

Of course, if I have not got a tutorship by the end of Greats, I must go and cram at once. The worst about the Home Civil is that I don't really want to get into it!

Your loving son—and with some real affection,

Roy."

No doubt Flecker's capacity for feeling sanguine was remarkable. Certainly, at all times, and to the end of his life, in spite of many disappointments which might have been expected to prove curative, he was far too optimistic about the ordinary material rewards of

"writing." Fond as he was, at Oxford, of John Morley's books, he had not laid to heart that far-seeing critic's acute verdict:—

> "We may be sure that no author could have achieved Macaulay's boundless popularity among his contemporaries, unless his work had abounded in what is substantially commonplace."

Whatever faults Flecker had or had not, no one could reasonably accuse him of being commonplace. How then could he attain popular and with it great pecuniary success? Even *Hassan* has not "succeeded" because Flecker's genius triumphed, or because his philosophy was acceptable, so much as because both were overlaid with the stage-effects demanded by a public which has acquired the kinema-mind.

Later on, while he was awaiting the results of Greats, Flecker went to Grenoble. As he confessed in one of his letters, he was apt to be impatient at home when Oxford vacations coincided with school terms. These times he preferred to spend with friends; at first in Wales and later on in Germany, France, Switzerland, or Italy. He never went as an ordinary, sight-seeing tourist, but was always full of eager, cultivated interest in men and affairs. Several times he went with a friend who was then considerably less well-off than himself, and he underwent in consequence some minor hardships, and even ran some risks, such as eating sausage and drinking coffee out of German automatic machines. At other times he would stretch finances intended for one to cover the bare necessities of two. Fortunately he had a marked gift for discovering cheap, if queer and out-of-the-way lodgings. These, with a friend, he greatly preferred to solitude in more solid, comfortable hostelries. At all times, even if some friends did not always show themselves wholly worthy of it, he was a warm-hearted and loyal companion.

During these holidays abroad he was always bent on practice in speaking and thinking in the languages:

his first visit to Italy, in 1906, not unnaturally made a deep mark on him. In very many of these wanderings he only wrote postcards home: but an occasional letter remains to show that to him foreign travel was very much more than self-indulgent recreation.

It was during his stay, rather a long one, at Grenoble, in 1906, that the second crushing disappointment, his third in Greats, fell upon him. Only one sentence, in one letter about it, does he ever seem to have written about it:—

"Grenoble,
Sunday, July 29th, 1906.

Dear Parents,

Many thanks for your letters. I suppose you have heard of my third in Greats, I ought not to be annoyed, but I am. I must be a frightful fool.

I have got to know a good many people by now, and yesterday I had a very good day. The whole University went to the Grande Chartreuse. We lost our way and had an awful walk. The students are a very curious set; I avoid the English and Americans as a rule: they are the ugliest and the most vulgar of the lot. There is, however, one Scotch lady who is quite pleasant. As soon as one gets out of town the country is magnificent. I have never seen anything in Switzerland like the Grande Chartreuse scenery, it is so different. Limestone, of course, and like Derbyshire on an immense scale. Next week I am going to climb a mountain 10,000 feet high—it is quite easy and safe. I shall not take the exam., I don't think the provincial diploma (with a good chance of not getting it) worth obtaining. I am afraid I shall only be able to send my love and best wishes for the silver wedding. It's a nuisance being abroad.

Love,
Roy.

P.S.—I am very sorry indeed not to be with you for your silver wedding. I wish you all possible joy and happiness, and I hope that now I stand some chance of being independent I may not be such a burden to you.

I am rather sick. I have heard nothing from the L.C.C., and Simmons has not troubled to write and give me the address of my landlady at Hampstead. You are probably wondering about the poems. A reader recommended their publication and they are at last in the press. They have undergone a very careful revision.

I rather sigh when I see a tour right into Italy by the Mont Cenis to Turin, and back over the S. Bernard. I shall leave about August 22nd, and get back to England in five or six days. I shall go straight to Hampstead and fix things up."

His deliberate turning from the failure to describe scenery and to talk about lodgings and unattainable tours is but an ineffectual cloak for his disgust, relieved by the hope that his tutorship at Hampstead may spare his parents' anxiety, and by pleasure in the fact that his poems were actually, as he hoped, in the press.

It seems clear that the mood of occasional, only half sincere bitterness which had worked itself off in such outbursts as—

"the lean and swarthy poet of despair,"

passed henceforward into one more serious and profound. He began to realise something of life's inevitable hardness, of its constant opportunities for disillusionment over things gone "agley." He saw clearly that he must now take some definite step, though he hardly yet saw of what kind, or in what direction.

Had he greatly distinguished himself in University examinations, he would doubtless have felt the same kind of pleasure as later on he took from being a practical and business-like British official. Yet, all that was on a plane entirely different from his life's dominant passion—to perceive Beauty, to create it, to bring it within the ken of his fellows. Perhaps it is not even now generally recognised that Flecker, however much he vacillated over the details of ways and means to it, always knew what he was about; the object of his real search and effort was ever clearly before him. Had it been equally obvious, in various times and places, to all those among whom his lot fell, the ultimate issue might possibly have been different.

Some of his circle realised that his reach was exceeding his grasp. His life-long friend, Mr. Cooper, an ever-

responsive recipient of Flecker's literary and other hopes and plans, has recorded his own view thus :—

"In these Oxford years and afterwards, Roy was, I think, in a good deal of distress. There was the future to think of. He would have liked to make a splash and win fame, I think, but there was anyway the problem of making a living to be solved. Perhaps he could have done something in journalism. He was not indolent, but he felt no call to any of the recognised pursuits in which rewards of industry are given. It is thus that I explain his Oxford career. He had no absorbing interest in questions of scholarship, ancient history, philosophical or otherwise, and could not devote systematic study to these things. Anyhow, he never came across the teacher who could inspire him with such an interest. In fact, in these days, many teachers seem to think that self-interest is the only kind of interest that their pupils require as a spur to industry, forgetting the origin and aim of the studies which it is their business to promote."

Mr. Cooper breaks off his explanation at the point where it was becoming revelation. Was not Flecker's comparative academic failure due to what a logician would call a composition of causes, or perhaps, more accurately, a conflict of opposites ?

Of the kind of self-interest which Mr. Cooper rightly deprecates, Flecker, as he hints, was singularly devoid. He did care to be a great artist. The phrase "a leader of men" fell more than once from his pen. But of self-interest in the sense of making money for its own sake, he showed no trace. It often worried him to feel a burden to others, but there his interest in money *quà* money ended. Not that he despised many things which money can buy: indeed, he desired them. But he seemed not to perceive the necessary interaction of cause and effect in the problem of a profession and its material rewards. In a childlike, or if anyone likes, a childish way, he expected what he wanted to be "there." After all, is it anything new, unheard-of for a poet to be unpractical ? For a poet he was, and other poets knew it. That one for whom in his very last years he had such tremendous enthusiasm, once wrote on the fly-leaf of a presentation copy of his *Anthologie des Ballades françaises*

which he was sending to a writer of an article on his own poetry and Flecker's—

à ——
avec toute ma reconnaissance
et en souvenir du très cher et vrai
et grand poète J. E. Flecker,
cordial et respectueux hommage,—

which recognition from Paul Fort, Flecker would have thought worth winning. Next, among his temperamental difficulties, to his entire lack of money-making interest, may, by his own showing and that of his teachers and peers, be reckoned his inexactness, his inaccuracy. Upon his fatal tendency to "howlers" he not seldom enlarged. It would be an exaggeration to say that originality does not help towards an academic first class, but it cannot be an essential: and it is certainly true that University examiners shrink from accepting it in lieu of accurate knowledge.

Thirdly, Flecker had a sufficient streak of genius to care more for creating something of his own than for dwelling excessively on other people's performances.

It is, after all, idle to look for all the great gifts in one and the same person:—

"Will Fortune never come with both hands full?"—

cried the dying Henry IV. as many others, before and after him, must have asked. Always, everywhere, the answer in human affairs is an emphatic No. He possessed many gifts necessary to success, but not all. In him were

"the elements so mixed."

Some few essentials were even conspicuously wanting. Mundane, pedestrian qualities they may, perhaps, have been, but indispensable in a world where genuine idealism is very scarce, and, by the majority, but lightly esteemed. So his comparative failure at Oxford was rooted in temperament and in circumstances.

But one cause of failure can hardly have been inevitable. Had the tragedy of Shelley sufficed "to point," for Oxford,

"a moral and adorn a tale," a great and sympathetic teacher might have averted the disaster. Greats is, in large measure, an examination in philosophy. It is true that more than once in his letters, specially in those to Mr. Sedgwick, Flecker remarked that he *hated* philosophy: he did not hesitate to pour contempt on metaphysics.

Yet, it is hard indeed to believe that a man so engrossed with problems of life and mind could really have detested philosophy. The particular presentment of it which fell to his lot may have failed to fit him: but that which is current at one place and time is not the whole of human philosophy. There can be no doubt that Oxford's general environment was more suited and sympathetic to him than that of Cambridge would have been. Yet, it is legitimate to wonder whether, had times and seasons so fallen that he could have discussed metaphysical, ethical, and psychological problems with Henry Sidgwick, his final attitude could have been one either of hatred or contempt.

CHAPTER IV

WAITING

THE interval between Greats and the beginning of Flecker's residence at Cambridge was not long, only some two years. His life during this time was varied, at times anxious, but all the while less unfruitful, perhaps, than it has sometimes been considered.

Upon the shock he received at Grenoble over Greats, followed the inevitable parting from Oxford life and friends. Some of these friends have contributed, for this book, recollections of the impression Flecker made on them. It must be remembered that they are not contemporary, but written after the lapse of ten or more years. In 1920 Mr. Nevill Forbes wrote :—

"I have no letters of James. I was very fond of him and miss him very much. My chief recollection of him is his unvarying good humour and companionability, and his willingness to listen appreciatively as well as to talk, and his freedom from intellectual pride. . . . I always found him delightful company, and he could be very amusing ; his banter upset some men, but he gave back as good as he got."

Beside this slight estimate, the curious in criticism may like to put Mr. Edward Shanks' recollection of a contemporary description of him by Rupert Brooke, which appeared in an article in *The London Mercury* of November, 1923. The pertinent passages are these :—

"He was, said Brooke, for ever talking about his own poetry. However the conversation began, that was always how it ended. 'We used,' Brooke told me, 'to argue for hours which of us wrote the better poems. But you know,' he added, with a touch of self-conscious and laughing naïveté, 'I could always see that he really did think his were the better.'"

Another Oxford friend, Mr. C. L. Freeman, wrote, also in 1920, to Flecker's mother :—

"I knew poor James very well, both as an undergraduate and after. I was very fond of him and I think he liked me. He did

not have much occasion to write to me anyhow, it was chiefly a case of answering invitations : he did write one or twice from the East, and I had a line from him in Switzerland late in life, but unfortunately I never keep any letters. . . .

As to general impressions, it is something of an undertaking to write a readable account of one's impressions of an artist (James was an artist) whom one chiefly saw before he came to his full powers. . . . The name conjures up such a confused medley of memories : mostly Oxford—a good many in Paris in Easter vacations : a meeting or two in London : it was always a regret that I was never able to go over to Cambridge and see him there. He used to come and read us his poems as he wrote them—I remember his reading us *Sultan Iskander sat him down*, in a café on the Boulevards, after the theatre one night ; he had just finished it."

These letters (omissions from which are only Mr. Freeman's references to his own personal affairs) would hardly need to be printed, if people, some of whom only knew Flecker by hearsay, had not made it their business to dwell exaggeratedly on passing phases of his very early manhood. Any student of human nature knows that special and urgent difficulties beset the vigorous, brilliant adolescence of those who are born to be artists. Not all of them, perhaps, have met and handled these as well even as Flecker did. Moreover, his life was distinguished by a persistence, rare even among the gifted, in following, in valiantly pursuing, through care, ill-health and not a little disillusionment, a visionary ideal. Anyone can lose patience with a dense world and express his vexation in over-strong language or in defiant posing. But not everyone like Flecker turns away from such wearing annoyance to write verse so beautiful that it lingers in the memories and sings in the hearts of those who, whether they met him or not, were his friends : who prized his swift perception, his chiselled workmanship, his fine diction ; qualities and capacities rare enough always, but more than ever precious in a slipshod era, in days of pose, artificiality, and meretricious sham. Another of Flecker's Oxford friends, Mr. Strong, has an estimate more elaborate than those already quoted :—

" A symphony so complex as Elroy Flecker's ' nature ' runs a

risk of being misinterpreted through excessive stressing of certain chords. From the time when he could first look about him, Flecker's sense was fed from the very heart of England. Gloucestershire bred he was, as he himself proudly tells us[1]: his first and most lasting inspiration was wafted to him from that peerless county's healthful rises. Lately, it was my privilege to idle awhile by some of the sites and scenes Flecker particularly cherished in the Cotswolds, at a season when the autumn tints were at their glory's height. Here and there, certain lines and sayings of him to whom these beautiful aspects had so intimately revealed their inwardness seemed to take, for me, very literally a new colour, and withal a deeper meaning. I felt that the longer I lingered there, the better I should understand the friend whose mind had not always been an easy book to read. And again, as I looked out one morning from the room which was his nursery first and then his study, upon the elms he reverenced, I felt that I was gazing from this fastness of his mind at what was probably most unchanging in his heart. I have no wish to dilate upon Flecker's constant love of rural England and Wales in general and Gloucestershire in particular: I simply wish to say that I knew him well enough to believe that these were the values which ever dominated in his being the glitter and the glamour and the glare which draped them. To those of us who knew and admired the sparkling Oxford *causeur* in his more widespread and his more intimate conversational *abandon*, the writers-up of the gorgeousness and riotousness of Flecker's quasi-Oriental vision have little to teach. We met that vision with acclaim; we hailed it, we hope we encouraged it. If we did, it would now be our proud boast. But I would like to emphasise quiet, mellow aspects of the man, which may not have been vivid enough to strike more than a few of his contemporaries. The Flecker of the stately rose-garden, the Flecker of the boxing-ring and football-field has a right to live on, because he never died within the rapt singer of the Damascus Gates."

When, after Greats' results, Flecker turned to face the real business of starting in life, three main possibilities appeared to lie before him: the Home Civil Service, journalism, and schoolmastering. His parents thought that the Home Civil Service might supply not only material means of living, the precise cost and value of

[1] Oh, well I know sweet Hellas now,
And well I knew it then,
When I with starry lads walked out—
But ah! for home again!
Was I not bred in Gloucestershire,
One of the Englishmen?

which it was, for him, with his easy-going ways about money, not unimportant to learn, but might also afford, along with serious work of a routine kind having its disciplinary worth, some assured if scanty leisure, in which, like not a few other civil servants, he might pursue his literary interests. That the problem of his future was difficult is shown by a somewhat unusual circumstance. During his last months at Oxford, two of Flecker's Oxford friends wrote to his parents about all these projects. Mr. Beazley wrote to the Poet's mother:—

"I expect Frank will give better expression to what we feel than I can, but I should like to say a few words, and will you forgive me if I am not quite convinced of what you have said to me, though I am aware that you should know Roy much better than I, and that I am young and not really able to understand the bearings of the case, but it is also because I love and admire him that I am so bold.

First, then, is it certain that even after a year's cramming, Roy would get a place in the Civil Service? It seems more probable to me that he would than it seems to F.: but still, Roy's studies have been chiefly dabblings, if you like to call them so, though I should prefer to say that it is only in the last two years that his eyes have been opened to see how much there is in the world to admire and observe: that he is impetuous and full of vigour, and that so far he has not had time to do more than feel his limbs like a baby.

At any rate, he would have to work very hard to get a place on the list; and so, secondly, is it not possible that a year in London, spent in a kind of drudgery, would have a bad effect on his character and prospects? I may be wronging Roy, but perhaps he would not accept the situation without discontent. I am afraid he would fret inwardly, at any rate, even if he should not let anyone know. And either he would neglect his work, or he would lose, at any rate for a season, some part of that energy and vigour which is so necessary a constituent of his character.

Thirdly, it seems to me that Roy has elements in him which make for success, as well as elements that make for higher things. He is pushful and self-assured, and he would not be too proud to pot-boil if he found himself in a strait. If he could get some journalistic position before he goes down . . . would you be willing to allow him to take up journalism as a profession? Dear Mrs. Flecker, I know that what I have said is very raw and youthful, but it is because I am so fond of Roy, and so anxious for his future that I dare to state the opposite side of the case at the risk of offending you.

I have not spoken with Roy on the present subject, or, at all events, not practically. . . . I am doubtful about the whole question, and I wish I could be as sure as you are that the Civil Service is the right career for such a restless person as Roy.

But perhaps, on the other hand, it would be just the right corrective for him, to teach him subordination and a certain degree of routine. . . . If I can only be quite persuaded, I shall do all I can to urge him to the course you think best for him, and to see that he works hard, as he must work, during the year in London. I have overstated the case against, but be assured that I shall support your view to him in spite of misgivings which I expect are due mainly to my ignorance of the world."

About the same time, Mr. Frank Savery wrote as follows to Dr. Flecker :—

" As to the H.C.S., I cannot honestly say that I think he will get in. . . . He seems at present to have lost all faculty for work he ever had. I must now speak of Roy's literary ambition. . . . I must say that I think he has literary genius, certainly he has literary talent, and that too of a sort likely to earn money. He is fluent and versatile to a degree, and, strange to say, willing to work hard over this sort of work. . . . As a journalist, I am sure he would make a name and an income (the latter, of course, in time only). . . . Had he been a little older, both in years and character, I should have said, ' Cut him adrift in town with £100 ' ; as it is, I daren't give that advice. . . . If you will kindly let me know what, after consideration, you believe to be the best plan, I will, I promise you, try to make Roy see reason. What is more, I will try and make him work, which is a matter of great difficulty."

Both friends minimised, though not equally, Flecker's chances of getting into the Home Civil Service. It seems curious that either should have found it " strange " that Flecker would work hard at anything and everything literary. Of course, it is always easy to be wise after the event, specially so for onlookers, whose vision and judgment are unaffected by emotions : but it is hard to understand why anyone knowing Flecker well, and admitting that literature was his predestined work, should not have expected him to toil at that, if at nothing else. Artists are notoriously unwilling to be diverted from their one purpose. To the painter his pictures, to the sculptor his statuary, to the poet his poetry are not

only work, but supremely work, the only kind for them worth doing. Few people, and perhaps artists never, love drudgery: for the hard toil which leads to fine workmanship is not unillumined slavery, which is precisely what drudgery is. In the fact that an artist will always and everywhere work at his art there surely can be nothing strange.

Anyhow, in the face of these letters, it is impossible to deny that on the edge of manhood Flecker had friends who recognised that his real, his dominant bent, was to literature.

As to schoolmastering plans, only Flecker and his father seem to have dreamed of possible success in that direction. Mr. Cooper was much surprised to find that his thoughts were turned to it. He wrote:—

"His interest in education struck me as extraordinary. The subject seems to me a dull one. He wrote *The Grecians*, perhaps as an attempt to make it lively. But the interest he took in the subject is apparently shared by a good many younger writers. Several of them in recent times have tried to write something readable about that terribly unpromising subject, school-life."

Though Flecker wrote his preface to *The Grecians* from the British Consulate at Constantinople, in 1910 therefore, the ideas in it must have been simmering in his brain, when at Cambridge he was considering his own future.

The book, though not everyone seemed to realise it, is a quite serious contribution to that strange blend of fact and fancy which in places of learning and examination syllabuses is called Theory of Education—a very different thing from the History of Education—and, at present, because it is inchoate and unsifted, of less value.

Flecker took no cheerful view of schoolmasters *en masse;* indeed, he compared them with men of other professions greatly to their disadvantage:—

"I have observed narrowly the faces of the business-men who pour out of the tube terminus. Anxious those faces often are—pale, feverish, elated with success, dejected with impending ruin:

yet none of them were languid, none bored. . . . Why is it, do you think, that teachers are such sad and bitter men?"

He made delightful game, too, of "a million irritations from faddists and quacks," and very short work of the popular idol, "self-realisation." He went so far as to write :—

"It is reserved for the sensitive men, for those whose fibre is weakened by learning and culture, to feel most deeply the misery of the world. It is education that makes a Leopardi bitter, or drives a Baudelaire mad. . . . I think we should, most of us, take more delight in the friendship of Rabelais than in that of Leopardi or Baudelaire—although, by the way, it was not only sensibility and intelligence, but also incessant ill-health that made these two great men unhappy."

Though Rabelais might not relish the implication that he was uneducated, yet these generalisations are not only remarkable from a man of twenty-five, but are interesting in showing his preference for happy good sense and healthy vigour.

So, remembering "the fair name of that great humanist Vittorino da Feltre" who "taught his Mantuans rhythm of body and mind," Flecker proceeded to build his ideal school, the outside "a blaze of colour"; to build it not with "renewal of old styles," but in one "as new as our school," on the fair coast he loved well, in the Hampshire bay near Southbourne. There, boys were to grow up in health "positive and exuberant," in a building constructed and managed so that what little dirt could, with such structure, find a lodging, could be quickly and easily eliminated, and so that available light could enter it. Games, not one or two only but many, were to contribute to this healthy life. As to work, he declared: "The morning will be spent entirely in teaching boys things that will help them to earn money," but "the afternoon we shall employ in real education."

It sounds a very nice plan; yet some will wonder if life really can be built in this neatly departmental fashion: moreover, the afternoon strikes some of us as but

a drowsy moment for so high a business as "real education."

Borrowing Plato's plan of "rulers of the state," Flecker proceeded to educate a proportion of the boys as "Grecians." These were to be selected from the rest as being "most proficient in the afternoon work," and without any regard to class or wealth. These Grecians were to be "as far as possible universal in their comprehension and admiration of the mysteries and beauties of life." The first step towards this ideal was philosophical training, which incidentally involved, of course, study of the literatures of Greece and Rome. Coincident with philosophy were to be cultivation of taste and training in art. The latter was explained to mean training in "literature, representation, and music." Further, Flecker insisted on the importance of acquiring power to translate, pronounce, and read Italian, French, and German :—

"To attain this pronunciation we shall most certainly not employ the ridiculously complicated script of the International Phonetic Association."

As to history his estimate of its value perhaps errs on the side of under-statement :—

"Our Grecians must have such acquaintance with history and especially with modern history, as will enable them to understand the political life of the present, and the artistic life of the past."

Then he adds :—

"I would suggest that our Grecians be compelled to learn sufficient mathematics to prevent their being put to shame in the affairs of life, and no more unless they specially desire it."

Then follows a glowing tribute to "natural science"—"an exacting mistress." The difficulty he propounds is that "science brooks no rival in the house," from which he infers that even to the Grecians no more can be indicated than "the charms and delights of science"; for he declares without misgiving that "those who would set about to perfect themselves therein, must do so in after years."

This, the longest and most important, possibly, of Flecker's prose works is included in the volume of *Collected Prose*. It is not, therefore, analysed here because it is inaccessible, which it is not; but because its main lines throw light on his development, character, and outlook. Who can doubt that if such a scheme had existed in England, and if Flecker could have been a "Grecian" in such a school, some of his greatest difficulties might have been prevented or solved? Which is not at all equivalent to saying that the plan would have had universal or even widespread success.

Again, however little to some about him he may have seemed to work, however urgently some of his college friends may have desired to goad him, this excursus on education proves, beyond all shadow of doubt, his versatile mental activity. He may not have, indeed he evidently had not acquired everything which is essential to a first in Greats; and it was, no doubt, a very tiresome omission. Yet, it should not have been wholly unforeseen. Mr. Cooper, long before, had, with an insight which seems rarely to have failed about Flecker, perceived that "He was not indolent, but he felt no call to any of the recognised pursuits in which rewards of industry are given." Anyone who knows anything, at first hand, of the history of education since Plato, must be aware that no idler nor ignoramus produced *The Grecians*. One could imagine, indeed, that some professor of education, more illumined than the common run, might, were it his own offspring, regard it with peculiar pride and satisfaction.

No doubt, at the moment when Flecker went down from Oxford, when he was still not quite twenty-two, it was all in his mind, though four more years slipped by before its publication: and it is reasonable to suppose that this living interest in theory urged him on to think of schoolmastering as his profession. His interest extended beyond theory to actual educational "methods." This appeared in *The Scholar's Italian Book*, in which, according

to the testimony of one of his friends, he took as keen an interest as he did in his poetry.

Anyhow, when he had gone down, he accepted a post at Mr. Simmons' school on Holly Hill, Hampstead, and there, during the autumn term, he taught. He found rooms, on the high ground close by, opposite to the Mount Vernon Hospital. His view of himself as a form-master he sent to his mother towards the end of that term :—

"Of course, I am coming home for Christmas. I should be very unhappy if I did not. I cannot get back on Saturday because one is busy at the school being fed and so forth all Friday : and there are a lot of things to see to.

The Christmas present you suggest is really too munificent. The dear boys in my form presented me with a charmingly ugly leather pocket-book of enormous size the other day. They are a funny lot of boys, all nice, with few exceptions. I am expected to do what I have always liked doing. I am perfectly free to educate the boys, and we do very curious things in form indeed.

Experience has confirmed all the views I have on teaching. It will be very interesting to tell Father what I do.

Nearly all the illustrations to my book are done. You will not like them at all, they are rather Beardsley-esque.

I don't really think I ought to let you be quite so nasty about ——. Of course, he is not my mother. But then my mother does not think her son not only a prospective power in the world and a genius, but also a most charming and affectionate companion. —— does. That's the difference. Genius, you know, my dear mother, is never modest.

Read the lives of Balzac, Tennyson, Carlyle, Ruskin, Swinburne; read Shakespeare's sonnet on himself that he wrote when a mere boy. Your interest in me is that of a mother in her son—you hate what I love, love what I hate, despise what I prize, prize what I despise, and think me weak, which is worse than being wicked in my eyes, as you know. I know exactly what you will say in reply—so, say something else."

After Christmas, for some weeks in the early part of 1907, Flecker returned to Oxford, to make in that city which he loved so well, the young, impecunious author's vain endeavour to support himself by writing. Though he kept the facts to himself, it is believed that he underwent some real hardship. When the project showed itself

to be intolerably unsuccessful, he wrote to his father about the Foreign Consular Service :—

"I don't like telling you my schemes till there is a real possibility of decision. But I think I have definitely settled to go in this year, if possible, for the examination for a Student-Interpretership—in Greece probably, or the Ottoman dominions. I should prefer Greece, especially as I can talk modern Greek a bit already.

The exam. will need work but not cram. I might, however, take Italian. I will tell you details as soon as I get full regulations. Please let me know if you are favourable to this plan and will help me. I am staying some days at Cambridge c/o P., S. Mary's Passage. I go to-morrow, so please write there. He is an old Oxford friend of mine, who has passed the exam., and is just off to Constantinople. It seems to me to be an attractive and wise solution."

While at Cambridge, Flecker wrote again on this project :—

"I have absolutely decided on the Student-Interpretership, and will give facts. If there is any more information, my friend has offered to write to you.

I have been to see the coach for the Consular Service, Dawson Clark, late Scoones. Wren does not undertake the job. His next term begins on April 17th, and lasts twelve weeks.

It is absolutely necessary to take all the optional subjects, *i.e.*, Ancient Greek, German, Spanish, and Italian.

I had better, according to Dawson Clark, go at once abroad, preferably to get to know how to write German and to read it.

There is a *viva* and translations—no grammar or literature questions. T., according to a man just from there, has become utterly worthless. I propose that you send me to Bonn or Heidelberg. . . . T. never taught one to read or write. . . .

The next exam. will probably be about January next, not later. There are said to be a specially large number of vacancies. The age-limit is twenty-four. If I fail I will try for the General Consular. . . . I ought to get over to Germany by Tuesday or Wednesday. I am staying at Cambridge till Saturday, and with P.'s people at Nutley Vicarage, Uckfield, Sussex, for the week-end. This is a purely business letter.

I have fortunately spent a good deal of time at Italian. If there were a *cours de vacances* at Florence this Easter, as I rather think there is, it might be wise for me to go there.

Please write at once and I shall get your reply at Cambridge. I am willing to make any arrangements to prove to you that I am

working hard. I leave it to you as regards monetary affairs. I know, by now, all the details of the Service.

I would much rather be in this than in the Home Civil. Excuse a very frigid letter: the frigidity is only superficial. I hope I have clearly shown I am in earnest."

Either there was some delay, or something had not gone quite smoothly, for a little later on, in one of his moods of half-petulant jest, Flecker wrote again to his father, anything but frigidly:—

"You would like a convenient and tidy appendage, conveniently evangelical, in a Government position, conveniently respectable, for a son. Instead of which you happen to have a poet for a son, and that is neither respectable nor evangelical. I am not a good appendage."

In the end he spent the Easter vacation at Tilley's, in Berlin, disliking everything extremely. Then, in the early summer, he settled down happily enough in a boarding-house, in that somewhat gloomy region, Torrington Square. Here he worked hard for his examination, though he stole time for his literary work, then and always his prime interest. During the year 1907 the *Idler* accepted and published some of his poems.

In his book on Flecker Mr. Goldring described a visit he paid him in Torrington Square. The account, as it stands, suggests bohemianism. But when it is analysed, and when account has been taken of Flecker's abundant possessions and constitutional untidiness, not very much that is highly reprehensible seems to remain.

When Mr. Goldring, in enumerating Flecker's favourite places of resort in London, quotes—

"He was fond also of the Vienna Café in Holborn, where he liked studying the types,"

it is difficult not to laugh. Really first-rate coffee was to be had there. Such respectable spinsters and even well-known educationists could, not seldom, be found there drinking it: so there mingles with regret for the war-time disappearance of that convenient café a suspicion that Flecker's tastes were not wildly exotic after all. It is

the thankless office of a veracious biographer to destroy picturesque legends. The incontestable fact remains that all his life long Flecker was a terrible accumulator, and that at home he had been spoilt by relations and old devoted family servants, who were ever ready to bring order into his chaos, and who never resented any amount of untidiness. When, removed from their rescuing providence, he was left to arrange his newly arrived Lares and Penates as best he might; the result was a bewildering mess, such as Mr. Goldring describes. This hopeless untidiness beset him from his earliest years. The old servant, still at Dean Close School, who had known him from babyhood, to whom, as he lay dying, his thoughts affectionately turned, remembers still, that when daily it fell to her to tidy his cubicle, she could only get in if she picked up one by one all the odds and ends, big and little, which he had dropped and strewn everywhere. The picture presents a curious and interesting contrast to the chiselled order and beauty of his literary work.

He went to Torrington Square, as he confessed in a letter to his mother, with some apprehension. Remembrances of the Grenoble *Pension*, where he had been unmitigatedly bored, disturbed him, and as he wrote—

"Besides, meals should be conducted alone over a book!"

Soon he complained of meals always late, a room on the fourth floor, and of his cramped condition in one room, with all his belongings, and paraphernalia for literary and examination work. Misapprehending his father's wishes he took a second room. When he discovered his mistake he repaired it, with his usual cheerfulness, by the consolation, "I am sure I shall work much better with this arrangement."

He found welcome relaxation with his uncle, who was a London curate then, and his aunt. It was they who sent him the "bewful" sausage on one of his Oxford birthdays. In their house he was always welcome and

happy. His aunt had been an art student at Lambeth, and she has written of his frequent visits, and of their common interest in art :—

"He took to trying to make me love poetry, but like his mother before him had to give it up. Then, he opened my eyes to Japanese Art ; there he was most successful, for he put it so wonderfully I could not help it. There was at that time a beautiful collection of old Japanese prints at the British Museum, and he said if I would only go and see it, I would understand for myself many points that he had tried to make clear to me. And I went, and I went more than once ; I admired them so. After that he told me which books to read on Ancient Egypt, then on to Russian art and music. His knowledge was wonderful on almost any subject : his language and the way he expressed his thoughts ought to have shown me what a genius he was."

During 1907, Flecker went to Bonn for the sake of his German. A visitor found him and the friend staying with him working hard one gloriously sunny morning, in the midst of untidiness and *débris* of all kinds. Over and over again the evidence of his indigenous untidiness crops up. From Bonn he wrote on August 13th :—

"I have taken a course of twenty lessons at Berlitz, two a week Spanish, one French ; no Italian to be had. Very dull town, indeed, but I suppose all the better for work. . . . My German is improving, but it's a hard tongue to write. . . . There are German students in the Pension, whom I talk to a good deal."

Throughout these months he was working diligently : then in the late autumn, he went with his friend J. to Italy. They made Florence their headquarters ; till, early in 1908, he came to England to take his examination. There were, after all, only three vacancies, and Flecker was second on the list. He was required after this to spend two years at Cambridge, though he was not obliged to begin residence till the May term.

Once more he fell back, for this interval, on stop-gap schoolmastering. For a very short time he took the work of an absent master at Mill Hill, but found his surroundings uncongenial. Evidently his purse was

lean, for he wrote to his father a "complaint" not precisely Chaucerian :—

"Bust indeed!
Have secured this place. . . . I imagine it will be about four weeks. I am utterly worn out, so forgive briefness. The boys . . . very respectful since I clouted one boy's head, first go-off.
The work has been hard. I like old Maclure. . . . To-morrow I stop teaching at 12, leave Mill Hill sta. 12.53, catch the 2.20 express at King's Cross for York, and get in at 10.12. I enclose address, and I appeal to Claire for clothes."

He went, as this letter shows, straight from Mill Hill, north, to another *locum tenency*, this time at Aysgarth, a beautiful place in the West Riding, which seems, however, not to have appealed much to him. His sudden exit from Mill Hill ended in the mishap of a parcel of clothes, sent there unluckily as a parcel, and not in a bag. The following letter, apparently the only one he wrote from Aysgarth School, was one of requests, some concerning his literary work, always close to his heart; the rest relating to the interpretership work which he was taking very seriously :—

"Dear Claire,

Am here in very pleasant country for a fortnight. Please pack my clothes in the green bag I got in Germany: two more 15½ not-frayed collars. All my type-written manuscripts, *Henderson felo-de-se Potter*, some others, a written manuscript left in Oswald's room, being a little play called *The Dead People*. A book bound, but type-written inside, called *The Book of Kara Jones*. All the copies of my own book,[1] there are about, and most specially a written manuscript called *The Last Generation*, which you will find lying in the top shelf but one of the bookcase in my room that I made myself.

Books :—

Meisner's German Grammar.
My *small* German-English Dictionary.
Frederick, in German, and some other *little* German book.
The Spanish-English dictionary and *nothing* else.

Of course, don't worry. The things underlined are the only things pressing, and do forgive my troublesomeness and abruptness.

[1] *The Bridge of Fire*, published in 1907.

Those clothes sent to me have been one uninterrupted curse. I have nothing to pack them in.

Send the thing by rail. I suppose Jervaulx, Yorkshire, on the N.E.R. is nearest, and let me know if I must fetch it from the station. I saw York Minster yesterday, but at night.

Ever your loving brother,
Roy."

This to a reader with insight is a little more than a catalogue of wants. Flecker has been charged with idleness, unpracticalness, untidiness. Yet, with the minutest care he sets down the things he wants, he knows exactly where they are, describes them precisely, asking carefully for those which are most urgent; and, at every turn, he does his best to cause the sender the least possible trouble. After all, tidiness, etc., are comparative. This letter was soon followed by a postcard:—

"Newton-le-Willows,
Feb. 17th, 1908.

This is the only postcard I have left, and the foolish virgin has covered it with lamp-oil. I shall go straight to see people at Scoones when I get to town. I will wire you my address as soon as I know it. I hope to get a reply to-morrow before I start, if not, shall have to get it from the Spanish Library in town.

Am sehr müde des pedagogischen Lebens. Have had a hard time here. Shall send off for entrance form the minute I get to town: remind me of it.

Love. Roy."

No one can be surprised that these fitful, scattered snatches of teaching wearied him of pedagogic life. In his *Preface* to *The Grecians*, he said: "I myself have been many times and in many places a schoolmaster." As a matter of fact, his Hampstead term in 1907, and those weeks in the spring term of 1908, first at Mill Hill and then at Aysgarth, were, apart from some coaching, his entire pedagogic experience. Perhaps his great weariness was soothed by the coming of that unique moment in a writer's life—the appearance of his first book of importance. *The Best Man* of Eights week, was only a pamphlet, and it was a joint, anonymous

production. *The Bridge of Fire* with its dedication to his greatest friend—

Poetae tenero, meo sodali

was published by Mr. Elkin Mathews as *Number* 45 *of The Vigo Cabinet Series*. It appeared, during 1907, in a red paper cover. It contained thirty-four poems, all republished by Mr. J. C. Squire in *Collected Poems*, save

Dorothy.
Pervigilium.
I have sung all Love's Great Songs.
To Francis Thompson.
Anapaests.
The Old Poet.
The Young Poet.

The Golden Head was republished as *The Queen's Song*, and *No Coward's Song* with its first line as a title. *When I translated Baudelaire* also received a new title. Of all these, perhaps *Anapaests* only could with any fairness be described as tinged with anything which can be called decadence, though the word is used so vaguely that it is difficult to know what some who use it really mean. The two closing stanzas do share the futility which spoilt the worst poems of the over-decried Nineties. Recently a fresh edition of the original book has been published, and the poems suppressed are again accessible. In this particular set of verses, the closing lines of the two last stanzas offer a curious contrast:—

I hate for I cannot attain,

throws off the mask and discloses the ineradicable idealism underneath it, in a way no "decadent" would ever have done. Whilst the other,

These songs I adore, they are mine,

is glaringly untrue. Flecker had nothing in common really with such verse, poor, posing, and empty beneath its sounding verbiage. The true Flecker is found in the unalloyed gold of his own poetry, which at its highest

and best was the revelation of his unborrowing, untouched originality.

What poetry is, he told the world before he left it :—

"For thee, Master of the World, poetry is a princely diversion, but for us it was a deliverance from hell."

All his life long to him poetry was neither a trick nor a trade, but a supreme way of escape.

CHAPTER V

CAIUS COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

In the May term of 1908, Flecker went to Caius College, Cambridge. He had rooms in Jesus Lane. It may as well be said at once that he never really cared either for the University or for the place. Once, indeed, he wrote that he had never been happier in his life; but the mood quickly passed. It is not difficult to account for his dissatisfaction. If Cambridge values one thing more than another surely that thing is accuracy of fact. To such a point is this passion for evidential statement carried, that an impatient person once complained that it is better at Cambridge to make nothing than to make a mistake. This factual precision, however high and admirable in itself, was not Flecker's ideal of great achievement; nor, as his letters show, was it within his grasp.

The place itself was alien to his tastes. The Fen country, it is platitudinous to say so, has its own wistful loveliness. He who once loves it will never forget nor tire of it. We all know Rupert Brooke's hankering delight in it, as, at Berlin, he grew every moment more irritable in his immediate surroundings :—

there, the unregulated sun
Slopes down to rest, when day is done,
And wakes a vague, unpunctual star
A slippered Hesper.

. . . . . .

I only know that you may lie
Day long and watch the Cambridge sky,
And, flower-lulled in sleepy grass,
Hear the cool lapse of hours pass,
Until the centuries blend and blur
In Grantchester, in Grantchester.

One need but put beside this softly dreaming picture

of the slow, willow-bordered stream, meandering among lush meadows scattered over with Lombardy poplars shimmering in sunshine or mellowed in the mist, these lines where Flecker, hungering too for home, asked not for lotus hours where the sense of time is lost, but for specific days, set cameo-like, in an unreturning past :—

Oh shall I never never be home again?
Meadows of England shining in the rain
Spread wide your daisied lawns : your ramparts green
With briar fortify, with blossom screen
Till my far morning—and O streams that slow
And pure and deep through plains and playlands go,
For me your love and all your kingcups store,
And—dark militia of the southern shore,
Old fragrant friends—preserve me the last lines
Of that long saga which you sung me, pines,
When, lonely boy, beneath the chosen tree
I listened, with my eyes upon the sea.

O traitor pines, you sang what life has found
The falsest of fair tales.
Earth blew a far-horn prelude all around,
That native music of her forest home,
While from the sea's blue fields and syren dales
Shadows and light noon-spectres of the foam
Riding the summer gales
On aery viols plucked an idle sound.

Flecker loved light, sharp edges, crisp sounds, clean, vivid colours—green, yellow, or blue. He eschewed mistiness, blurred contours, half-caught murmurs, soft hues blent in the gloom. So, not for him were the far-stretching slumbrous Fenlands, and the little grey town on the Cam.

His old Uppingham friend, Dr. C. E. Raven, sometime Dean of Emmanuel, attributes some of his inability to profit by and to enjoy thoroughly his two years at Cambridge to the untoward moment when he came there. He wrote :—

" It was as regards affectation or self-consciousness that I noticed the greatest change in Flecker, when six years after seeing him at Uppingham he was suddenly brought into the Bachelors' Common Room at Caius, and introduced to me by the Dean. He was still

brilliantly original, still arresting in his outlook: he had a very wide knowledge of things and books, especially of the obscurer sides of the classical tradition and literature; he was very greatly developed in the extent of his abilities and in power of expression; but he seemed to me to have lost the spontaneity and directness of his school-time.

He had become consciously a rebel, and consciously a genius—and the effect had been wholly bad. His criticism of men and things was no longer (I think) instinctive and true, because it was now apt to be affected. At school, he never posed: at Cambridge, though he was a model of sincerity by the side of many of his contemporaries, he was no longer unconscious of the desire to produce an effect, or unwilling to give way to it. Nor do I think that the atmosphere of the place was good for him. The University was in a state of unrest.

Conventional standards in morals and religion had for the time broken down badly: the 'New Hellenism' of Lowes Dickinson and Gilbert Murray was fashionable, and with it came an outburst of abnormality and a revival of something like the æstheticism of the 'nineties.' The literary society which Flecker originated, and which included Rupert Brooke . . . was typical of the time. Several of its members were genuinely original, men of free and fearless outlook prepared to test life faithfully and tell the truth about it; Flecker belonged to this group. But others were mere *poseurs*, bundles of rather nasty affectation. . . . I am afraid that the effect of the society on all its members was bad. I think even Flecker lost much of his sincerity and frankness. . . . He had immense possibilities for good in him, as well as wonderful gifts of freshness and originality."

To Flecker himself Cambridge appeared prosaic, and the end of his first letter from Caius is a sly dig at its dullness, and he wrote from the Union Society to his mother on May 25th:—

"Three more interpreters are coming up, which will make things more lively. C. suddenly appeared here on Saturday, and I gave him a lunch which he ate with great zest and delight. He really is a most charming old man, though not of the spiritual variety. Indeed, the opposite I fear, with something of a fat and monkish joy in the pleasures of life. K. has been in to lunch to-day. He is dull, but I don't mind the dullards as much as I used; besides, in one's college one should be tolerant.

Under the heading, *Derelict*, the editor of *The Granta* (whom I met at dinner the other night) is publishing an editorial on me

(quite absurd) as the typical Oxford man ! ! ! Oxford, the part of it I hate, would explode with wrath at this representation.

I amuse myself by punting a canoe to the great envy of all, for Cambridge (with rare exceptions) has not yet learnt to steer its punts. But, becoming hubristic, as the Greeks say, I insisted to-day in taking the lightest canoe in the river and fell into the middle of Camus. (No audience, fortunately, as it is a cold day.) Into about a foot and a half of water. Wherefore I praise the Cam that it is not as the Thames. . . . Lunched with my tutor yesterday. Dull. He doesn't teach me anything, only looks after my morals. It is a Cambridge custom."

Fortunately for him Cambridge terms are short, and the rules of the Consular Service obliged him to spend a considerable part of his vacations abroad, so he could dilute the dullness. In this May term he planned to go to Italy, and wrote to his mother :—

" Many thanks for your letter. As the college will let me pay my bill in October, I shall have plenty of money for my Italian excursion. I shall start on the 4th of August, and shall, I expect, spend a month in Italy and a month in France. I will not fail to come and see you in October before I come here (I come here 13th), and will send you postcards of my wanderings. I am so sorry not to be able to come to Radnorshire, as I particularly wanted to see the place and to take you about."

Though Cambridge seemed to him far less enjoyable than Oxford, he did not refuse anything in the way of entertainment that it offered. In a postscript to this letter, he remarked :—

" I nearly won all sorts of absurd races—sculling, punting, etc., in the Caius Regatta (only a joke it is) yesterday. I coxed a four ! The fours are drawn by lot, and as some of the men have never been in a four in their lives, the result is funny. Fours are very wobbly boats. It was the fifth crab that stroke caught that lost us one race."

When Cambridge depressed him unbearably, he escaped elsewhere :—

" I went up yesterday and looked at the Franco-British. It was rather fun, and the flip-flap exciting."

All this while he was working hard, and his thoughts and energies were fully concentrated on his future :—

" There are two places for Turkey, two for Morocco, two for

Persia. I chose Turkey though Morocco is rather tempting. Our Turk teacher is wildly excited about the new Constitution. He is a 'Young Turk,' and has been standing 'fizz' to all the second year. (We have not come in for any.)

The triumph of the Constitutionalists will be a great blessing to me; it means a much freer and more comfortable life in Turkey."

As was always the case with him about everything in his environment, his moods vacillated. Just as he was leaving Cambridge in June to start off abroad, he wrote to his mother:—

"I have really got to know quite a great number of nice people here, and am getting more content with Cambridge than I was."

The promised postcards arrived, rather sparsely, from Italy. One from Assisi recorded that he had—

"Met J. at Perugia, we are travelling to Rome. . . . Weather here quite cool and pleasant."

His casual remark on another, "got to Chiasso for £2 12*s*. 3*d*. from London," is a pleasant reminder of pre-war possibilities. The next from Arezzo shows that they were, at any rate, not indolent or extravagant:—

"We get rooms for a franc a night, and travel third class, and are having a very extensive and pleasant journey. My itinerary has been Perugia, Assisi, Rome, Viterbo, Orvieto, Siena, San Gemignano, by foot; Volterra, Cecina, Montefes cali, Usciano, drive to Monte Olivito, Monte Pulciano, Cortona, Arezzo, whence I write.

We stay for a few days at our old Florentine *Pension:* a letter thither would find me."

In spite of his alleviated mood when he was leaving Cambridge, he did not like it any better when he returned for the Michaelmas term. Concerning a proposed visit of his mother and sister, he added as a postscript—

"I do hate Cambridge, except for my nice rooms, and a few, a very few friends."

It is, however, if a small yet an interesting fact that having been so changeable at Oxford about his rooms,

he was quite contented with his Cambridge lodgings. Apropos of her coming up, he wrote to his mother :—

"You can have a room here. The landlady, though rather talkative, is the best I have ever had."

In a letter, thanking his mother for birthday gifts, after recording one of the multitudinous results of his untidiness :—

"I lost my furry gloves, and was very annoyed. They turned up again to-day, to my great delight : I am having my name written in them in large letters ; I will do the same with my overcoat "—

he proceeded to give these favoured lodgings a further testimonial :—

"I can't get rooms in college. But I really am very comfortable. Miss —— has put me up the blue curtain that belongs to the door, and my new table-cloth improves the room enormously."

Apart from this comfortable content with his room, Flecker seems to have remained throughout the term rather like a fish out of water. He made a sudden week-end journey to Paris, according to the following letter, which, though undated, appears to fit in here :—

"Dear Mother,

Must tell the truth. A French friend of mine, the Count of Pimodan, has been over here and is just off to Paris. I told him how I wished I could get a sort of travelling tutorship to stay with some foreigner, and he said he thought I could get one from a friend of his if I would come for the week-end with him in Paris. I said I had lots of work and could hardly rush away even for a week-end without telling you : but he said he had got to go off to-day, and there was no time. So I thought I'd better go. I hope you won't be angry. I shall be talking French continuously for two days. I expect I shall be back Monday afternoon. I simply didn't dare miss the chance.

Your loving son,
Roy."

Apparently, when he returned, he wrote dispiritedly to his mother in this letter which is dated November, 1908 :—

"Am very tired of life and fearfully miserable. The wretched

people in Paris had gone into the country, and I had to wait a day for them and then as they didn't appear I came back.

I didn't write yesterday because I was so very tired. I am so miserable. I really think I ought to stay in Cheltenham and work for some time at least quietly at home. I am sure I work there better than in any other place. . . . Where are you going next August? And shall I come with you? At any rate I shall see you soon."

This incident has never been explained: but it was the kind of gratuitous stupidity which, coupled with its incidental fatigue, would suffice to make him by turns too optimistic and too careless, and then "miserable"; all the more so, because his daily life at Cambridge irked him. His depression there may have been partly physical; the Cambridge climate is said not to suit everybody. More probably he chafed under the almost Puritan seriousness of the place; which must have been all the more confusing when mingled with the kind of affected frivolity of those particular years which Dr. Raven has described.

Possibly, too, some people took Flecker not too seriously, for he was quite serious enough, but took him seriously in the wrong places. He was at once old for his years, and boyish; far better informed and more widely interested than average men of his age, and yet youthfully pleased to mislead the solemn and scandalise the dull. He quickly wearied of expounding the obvious to the virtuously foolish. Dr. Raven hints that even he posed, at times. It is conceivable that rather than argue he would fill out a rôle thrust on him, or play a part for the sake of an entertaining experiment. The root of the difficulty was that for some time after going up to Caius, he, by some mischance, was not in his proper element.

A passing cause of vexation at this very moment appeared in a letter to his father, explaining his disappointment over the publication of his poems. He was obliged to find another publisher, and, though a small calamity in itself, it seems to have upset his literary work. He wrote that he had been over to Oxford to

VIEW FROM THE NURSERY WINDOW, LOOKING TO SOUTH-EAST ACROSS THE GARDEN TO LECKHAMPTON HILL AND THE COTSWOLDS.

write in the Union Library; but even that consolation failed,

"I find I write rather slowly and unwillingly."

When it is remembered that the room in Dean Close which had been his nursery—the room with the beautiful prospect across his beloved rose-garden, bordered by the elms of *November Eves*, and bounded by the Cotswolds rising against the sky—was in later years his study at home, it is not difficult to sympathise with his impatient impulse to leave this place he did not love, to turn his back on the remembrance of "wretched people," to go home and stay there.

However, instead he took, in the Christmas vacation, a holiday tutorship near Dorking. From three rather amusing letters to his mother the following details of this different experience in teaching may be gathered:—

"I had a most delightful time in Woking. Here—I cannot judge yet—a stupid youth for the Matric., and a Hungarian from Trinity, Cambridge, for his General. The old man[1] himself seems cheerful: badminton is dull. I have got my money, which is a relief. I think on the whole I shall be rather glad to get to Cambridge! Even Cambridge. I am going to have plenty of work to do here."

Four days later he sent home a more considered judgment of those people he had undertaken to "cram":—

"The work is quite hard. One of my pupils is an Austrian. I teach him Tacitus. As he knows little English and less Latin, the task is difficult. I teach him Homer. As he knows no Greek the task is impossible. He is a merry and chubby person. The other who finishes to-morrow, is an unpleasant, ignorant and ugly youth, very conceited, who rejoices in the name of ——, but undoubtedly hails from far Judæa's sunny shore. He was éduqué at Malvern, and knows blank nix. G. is a very nice old bird. . . .

If father has written to Cyprus for cigarettes I should like 500. Have written to Y. not too lovingly but nicely."

In his last letter from Surrey he said:—

"I am leaving here Wednesday evening, but I have already been paid my cheque for my full £6, which is not bad for nine days'

[1] *I.e.*, the Head of this cramming establishment.

work, counting Sunday. I protested against being paid the full sum, without avail.

I have not done very much writing here—only two or three pages, but I have had time to get through quite a fair amount of Persian. . . .

One of my pupils, the Judæan, has gone, so I shall have an easier time next week. . . . I am going to send father's books back before I leave here; he may rely on my doing so, because I want more room in my box!"

There is nothing in any way remarkable in these letters, except that they show beyond any doubt that Flecker, in spite of his poetic temperament, could drudge over very dull persons.

Belonging about these months, though it is undated, is a letter which gives one cheerful detail from Cambridge:—

"I just ran into S. in the middle of the street, and he told me, to my enormous joy, that J. has got the Gaisford."

At the beginning of the Lent Term of 1909, he tried to strike a bargain with his sister. Writing to his mother, he said:—

"Would Claire be so very kind as to send me—

Eve and de Bauder's French Grammar
Book on French Subjunctive,
Qu'est que cela veut dire,
Spanish-English Dictionary,
Fitzgerald's Six Plays from Calderon,

from my room. I will send her Milton's Prosody and other things she wants to read, if she will."

No one can fail to be struck by the fact that during his first two terms, Flecker was, for so naturally sociable a person, left remarkably outside Cambridge life. In part this was doubtless due to the fact that post-graduates are somewhat apart from undergraduate life, and to the further fact, that in tastes and knowledge Flecker was maturer than his age, or, at any rate, was a man of specialised tastes for certain branches of knowledge which do not appeal even to all post-graduates who are studying languages. In this Lent Term of 1909, however,

his partial isolation came to an end, when he found a congenial friend in Mr. Francis Birrell. At once his depression lifted. He wrote in February, after his fashion, to both parents at once :—

"Do excuse a pencilled scrawl. But really I write so much better in my arm-chair with a pencil than sitting up at a table. It is thus I compose my masterpieces you know, and thus I write my best letters.

But is anything more monotonous than Varsity life? What happens? I have dined with Professor B. as I do regularly once a term. I have made a great friend of Mr. Augustine Birrell's respected son. And at present I have a working fit on: which won't last very long: but just for a few days I have been shutting myself up and working all day. There is something very desolate about these Eastern Counties, and I often wonder how the garden is getting on. Are there any flowers yet about? I wish you would send me some. I think they would cheer me, for this is a very flowerless place.

I saw in the *Daily Mail*, or some silly paper, that a bachelor's room, or a room where there is no female influence may always be known by the absence of flowers, however beautifully it may be kept otherwise. I think there is something in the remark.

Even you would like my dawg[1] if you could see him. He is a darling, such a little fool."

Oddly enough before he could post his letter flowers arrived and he added a postscript—

"Thank you so much for the beautiful flowers, which make my room look very bright and cheerful."

No doubt he still girded at the dullness, but the whole atmosphere of this letter is different.

The Easter Vacation he thoroughly enjoyed, partly with a French family at Neuilly-s.-Seine, and the last days with his own family at Wootton Courtenay in Somerset. When he was back at Cambridge he wrote saying that the change, specially in Somerset, had enabled him to take some interest in life again; and he wrote amusingly of "a penniless and horribly respectable

[1] Flecker was very fond of animals. He specially liked to have a cat on his knee when he was writing. A family of black cats at Dean Close, who usually did not live in the house, always knew when he returned, and insisted on coming in and being with him.

Austrian waiter," whom the Caius porter, knowing he could speak German, brought to his rooms. Flecker's comment was :—

" I fed him and bedded him and got a German I know to pay his fare to town and give him a letter to the Consulate. So he's gone, thank goodness."

This May Term of 1909 found him in the happiest mood of his Cambridge career. In a letter home, he said :—

" I'm afraid it's rather a long time since I wrote : but J. has been up here for a week-end and I have been gay and busy. I can't easily tell you *exactly* for how long I shall come. I shall leave here June 14th, spend a night, or two at most, in Oxford on my way and arrive the 16th of June.

I shall stay with you till I come back here—but don't know how early in July that will be.

Leaving Cambridge again about August 8th to 12th. I shall have to spend six weeks in France, and am thinking of bicycling, if I can get Prothero's bike—for mine's gone hopeless—with a Cambridge man. But as I've got till October 10th I might put in some days with you. If I don't go to France in the Long, I shall have to go both at Christmas and Easter.

I am very happy, cheerful, and well : in fact, as cheerful as I can ever remember being."

After all, Cambridge in the May Term is irresistibly charming. No one can then grumble at the " climate " ; even if in other terms it may have contributed something to his *malaise*. In spite of this temporary alleviation of mood, he never was quite at home at Cambridge. No one who ever really entered into the inner life of the place could have written such a letter as this :—

" Jesus Lane,
Cambridge.

Dear Father and Mother,

It is true that I have not written for a long time. But nothing really happens in this odd place at all. One plays fives, one loses the dog, one goes out to perpetual lectures and meals. I have had a quarrel with the Turk. He abused me for coming in late, although I had been with Professor Brown and had sent a message to say I should be late. I swore I would not be treated like a

schoolboy and left the room. Sympathy all on my side. Said lecturer is leaving at the end of this term.

Talked about Bernard Shaw last night to a set of the stupidest fools I have ever met in the course of my University career. Am going to collect little elephants, like the man collected pigs. Everyone is going to give me an elephant for a Xmas card. The *Nation* wants another carol. No news from the *Athenæum*, except a reply to my letter saying my letter had been forwarded to the editor. Letter from J. who is being frozen with cold at Athens.

Ever your loving son,
Roy."

As a matter of fact, he did not pass the Long Vacation of 1909 quite as he had proposed to do. His most intimate Cambridge friend appears to have been Mr. Francis Birrell, and evidently he stayed with him, at the end of the May term, on his way to London for one of those fairly numerous visits which he spent in efforts to make his way with editors. A postcard to his mother accounts for those first days after he left Caius :—

"Kensal Rise,
July 1st, 1909.

"Have a most lovely bedroom, 6*s*. for five days with bath. Had a very pleasant time with Birrell; saw their house, which is beautiful."

The Long Vacation "Term" he spent at Cambridge working for the intermediate examination. He had, resident at Cambridge at the time he was there, an old Cheltenham friend, Mr. Woollcombe Boyce, who was a Caius man. To him is due the recollection of the existence of an article which Flecker contributed to *The Caian*. In 1923 Mr. Boyce wrote to Flecker's mother :—

"I will send you *The Caian* in which Roy's article appeared. . . . I am so sorry that I never kept any letters of Roy's. I had very few, anyway. I can just tell you about when I came to know him fairly well. It is true that I had always known him casually and he visited me at Radley, and I him at Oxford. But he was some half-dozen years my senior. . . . I was at the Union (Cambridge) listening one night to a debate, when I became aware that he was sitting in front of me. I was quite astonished; as I had not the least idea he was at Cambridge. I was still more astonished to find that he was at Caius, where I was. After that we saw quite a little of one another,

and, I can remember, used to play tennis and bridge together. We also both knew and used to spend evenings with the French lector, M. Audra, who is now living in London. He must have been about Roy's age. What I recall of his tennis was just a quality which matched that of his mind—he was ambidextrous, and often took backhanders by shifting his racquet to his left hand.

I used to have tea with him at his rooms in Jesus Lane. I think these occasions were always *à deux:* you must remember that he more naturally found his companions among older students, or the very few who were taking the same course, amongst whom I remember one, Selous (nephew of the hunter), whom I also knew, and Gilliatt-Smith (also at Caius), whose speciality was Romany.

I don't think our conversations were deep. He would talk of his travels abroad, and we often discussed European routes. I found I knew the Continental Bradshaw even better than he did. I could never get him to speak much of his verse: he expatiated at greater length on his Italian Grammar, which I saw in manuscript. He was rather strong on phonetics. At the time he had a (probably passing) craze for collecting little elephants, with which his room was somewhat replete. I gave him two to add to the menagerie. He had a weird Caran d'Ache jointed wooden lizard, painted black and yellow,[1] which had a prominent place on his mantelpiece, and rejoiced in the name of the Demon of All Sloth.

He had quite a library up in his room; I bought a Decameron off him, in Italian, which I was then studying, and have the volumes still. I asked him once to write his name in a volume of his poetry which I already had. He inscribed it with my name and his, whimsically adding,

'Dono non dedit.'

He spoke occasionally at the Union, and certainly in our own debating society; but he did not, naturally, take a very active part in the college life, as his interests were outside, wider and more mature. . . .

He never seemed to us anything but robust, and I simply looked forward (when we both came down in 1910) to meeting him later, probably somewhere abroad, but I did not."

In another letter, Mr. Boyce, commenting again on Flecker's aloofness from undergraduate life at Caius, said, "On the other hand he was far from being an associate of the Dons."

Mr. Boyce was editor of *The Caian*, and it was at his instance that Flecker's poems were reviewed there, and

[1] In another letter Mr. Boyce says it was green. It is to be feared that the creature has perished, and that therefore the point cannot be decided.

that the article, already mentioned, was specially written for and published in it. Concluding his second letter, Mr. Boyce wrote :—

" I think Roy was pretty widely known in the Varsity, during his two years at Cambridge, and he certainly knew everyone worth knowing at Caius. He was not in the least socially aloof, though he was intellectually. His experience was so much larger than that of his congeners. He was typically Oxonian to the end ; and I much doubt whether he was in the least influenced by his sojourn at Cambridge."

The article to which Mr. Boyce refers, and which he has recovered for inclusion here, was called *A Visit and an Invitation*. Slight, but with a strand of the fantastic attitude which was so strong in all Flecker's imaginative as distinguished from his critical prose, it is worth consideration as a kind of younger brother of *N'Jawk* and *The Last Generation*. It was printed in *The Caian* during 1909. *The Last Generation* in its final form filled sixty-four small square pages, wrapped in greyish-violet paper covers, with a picture outside of "the brown repulsive little apes . . . *one of them building a fire*," the closing gruesome detail in what is, perhaps, the grimmest thing Flecker ever wrote. Its dedication was

To Frank Savery
who taught, encouraged, revealed.

When Messrs. George Bell issued Flecker's *Collected Prose*, pride of place was given to this curious phantasy. With *N'Jawk* and to a far less degree, *Mansur* and *The Caian* sketch, it represents the sardonic side of Flecker's wit, which flashed again in *Taoping*, and in episodes and sayings in *Hassan* :—

A Visit and an Invitation.[1]

" Owing to a series of accidents, I never made the acquaintance of my soul until I was twenty-one years old. On the day of my majority, however, a meeting was arranged, and I set out, aglow with excitement and accompanied by my friends, to pay him a visit.

' What sort of a person do you expect to find ? ' said my friends, puffing and struggling to keep up with my impatient strides.

[1] *The Caian*. Michaelmas, 1908, Lent and May Terms, 1909, p. 198.

'I am not sure,' said I. 'It is very probable that he will have dove-breast coloured wings and fine clothes.'

Once I saw quite an ideal face in a dream.

Yet, after all, I should prefer to find a tall red man, naked at his anvil, like a Meunier. But we arrive.

Undaunted by the wiry red architecture of my soul's residence, and scorning to knock, I entered.

To my surprise I found nobody but a little bald fellow making a most godless mess in a pot.

Politely veiling my disappointment, I asked this curious dwarf his occupation and trade, and the purport of his brew.

The little man who had a kindly face wiped the moisture from his horn spectacles and replied with deep regret:

'Alas, Sir, I am a Prose Poet, and that is the purport of my brew.'

My companions roared with delight. Some stretched out their lean arms and whistled, 'We always said your poems were exercises in metre.' Others raised their chubby fingers and squeaked, 'We never ceased observing that you were far too conceited to write good prose.'

I could have wept at their rudeness and intuition: I bade farewell to the bald gentleman and quitted his laboratory. As I came out I saw a woman whom I thought pretty: and went to meet her, waving farewell to my friends, 'Never mind, O long and short ones,' said I. 'I know the worst at last, and I accept my fate. I will sweat forth nonsense enough to win me name and fame, but I will never fail to enjoy my dance with Biancofiore. No more manacles of metre, no more decorum and periodic pomp. I have never grasped ideas, O Biancofiore: kiss me for that. We are bodies, and they are shadows and deceitful: we do not want ideas in our cottage; we would rather have a bathroom. And I have never gripped facts, O Biancofiore: but I can grip you and do so, and that is a fact, and a good fact, and a fact that shall be many times a fact, princess of all the worlds.

O come and learn the ways of love, here, under the stars and trees, in this stately and ordered Park.

Summer night, O Biancofiore: come and watch the stars in the fountain, all among the twisty fishes.

Biancofiore come!"

At the end of the Long "Term," Flecker confessed himself overdone with the strain of the examination:—

"Jesus Lane,
August 9th, 1909.

Am exhausted with over-work. Very difficult to try and do during the exam. what one ought to have done in a year. Exam.

finishes to-morrow. Have had ten hours' work for five days literally.

Shall take a good rest and not come till Friday or Saturday, unless you specially want me.

Love,
Roy."

Towards the end of the "Long," Flecker went to a Fabian Camp at Llanbedr. There he fell in love with and became engaged to a very attractive girl whose beauty of a rather Burne Jones type was enhanced by great personal charm. She had distinct artistic gifts; she was, which was a source of great pleasure to him, a good violinist: she dressed and talked well, achievements not always conjoined.

Flecker's letter to his parents is, in its abrupt and comprehensive sweeping of past and present into one whole, entirely in keeping with his life-long capacity for total absorption in a given moment and set of conditions:—

"Pen-yr-Allt,
Llanbedr,
Merioneth, N. Wales,
September 7th, 1909.

Dear Parents,

I am very hurt that I have had no letter from you at all. I am going to Cheltenham on Thursday, and then coming on to town as soon as I can, as I want to meet you in Town. For why? A thing has happened to me that I dreamt not of. What I hinted at has befallen. I am engaged to a fair woman, E. F., with whom I am so much in love that I will spare you all recital of her virtues and charms. You will understand when you see her, and hear her play the violin. And she has £400 a year of her own, so we need not wait: but we hope you will marry us before we go to Constantinople.

I will say no more: it is so futile writing things down. Please write by return to Dean Close, with *To be left till called for* written on it; and do write me a nice letter, and give us your blessing.

Your loving son,
Roy."

Apparently his letter miscarried, and Flecker wrote disappointedly:—

"Dean Close School,
Cheltenham.

Ten minutes to write in.

I suppose you never got my letter! Bother, I wanted you to see her in town. I have to go and see her people. Mother and sisters only. And *do* ask her here for about the 20th."

In his next letter he announced that he had "got a ring with a stone[1]—well, you shall see—made for us."

His fiancée's mother was greatly pleased with the engagement, as the following extract from a letter she wrote to Dr. and Mrs. Flecker seems to show :—

"The more I see of Roy the better I like him. He is a dear fellow and will, I feel sure, make a good and kind husband to E. Of course, he is young for the responsibility he is undertaking, but there is no teacher like love, and I think he loves E. very much. I know that she is quite devoted to him. They have so many interests in common, that I think they should be very happy together. We all find Roy such good company."

In spite of his engagement, he went back to Cambridge for the Michaelmas Term of 1909 with all his customary interest in his interpretership work, and in his literary projects : his letters about his everyday life are written in his usual ingenuous strain :—

"I have kept on meaning to write a more suitable and grateful letter thanking you for your great kindness to me. . . . I am doing more work than I have ever done at the Varsity before ; but I am very tired of it. Doing Turkish all day long isn't a bit like reading. . . . I am cultivating a moustache. Francis says it grows so fast he can hear it whistle. But it doesn't grow fast enough for me, as I daren't see E. till it is fully grown, and that makes me impatient. . . . Have you a Koran in Arabic? If so, please send it me, if you can spare it, by return."

The next two letters refer to his twenty-fifth birthday, hailed, like all family anniversaries, with zest :—

"You are really very munificent to me. I am going to try very hard to put my house in order during the next few months : to pay off everything I can, and then, when I come down, if I am still in debt, which I am afraid I shall be a little, as there is the six weeks in France which will cost lots and lots, I hope that after my exam.

[1] The "stone" was a black opal.

(which will probably be in March) I shall have some time on £200 a year in England,[1] without living at Cambridge, which should clear me up a good deal.

I have a poem in *The Nation* this week.

I am doing lots of work, but it's a slow and weary business. I tidied my desk to-day instead. It took three and a half hours to do!

When I think of the expense it will be outfitting[2] my blood runs cold. . . . I love the cake. Mrs. F.[3] sent me a box of cigarettes. E. is giving me a most marvellous enamel snake ring, but as they made a muddle at the jeweller's, it won't arrive for a day or two. I hope to go up to town for a half-day trip on Tuesday."

It is probable that the following letter, though undated, belongs to this birthday. Several letters to his young sister and brother are in existence; but this one seems the most characteristic:—

"Jesus Lane,
Cambridge.

Dear Children,

Many thanks for the admirable socks, and also for your most amusing letters. I am so awfully sorry to hear that Claire is unwell. I hope she is by now rushing round the house as usual. I suppose Joyce spends all her time making smells like bad eggs, and calls water H_2O. It is a great mistake to think that one knows any more about water because one calls it H_2O. A mistake into which most scientists fall.

I hope Oswald will master ἵστημι. I never did. But then I was not a brilliant child. Again, a thousand thanks for the socks. On very cold days I shall wear two pairs at once.

Love to all,
Roy."

A few days later, he exhorted his mother—he having at length learned the mysteries of journalistic publication—not to go on buying newspapers which might not contain what she expected to find:—

"Don't buy no more *Nations* till I tell you—as apparently they won't put it in till they want it. I merely judged by the receipt of a proof. I am having several things in *The Cambridge Review*, from the editor of which I have received a very flattering letter. I will send them to you when they appear. . . . I think I told you the exam. is on May 1st."

[1] His official salary as interpreter.
[2] Expenses of his uniform, etc.
[3] His fiancée's mother.

His engagement made no real break in his hard work, and his fiancée undoubtedly influenced him to make strenuous efforts for his examination. Though they managed to snatch odd days, here and there, to spend together, she was as energetic in preparing herself for their future *ménage*, which must be conducted on a sufficient but by no means abundant income, as she was in trying to keep him to his professional work.

In one of her letters to Flecker's mother she said that "the Roy-Boy" was coming to London to take her to see the *Electra*, which she supposed would leave them "harrowed to the marrow." She recorded her purchase of "a very fat Mrs. Beeton," adding, "the poor lady gets stouter every year, as the ingenuity of cooks and those who provide their utensils increases." She entertained, however, no hope of becoming that ideal mistress whose dread perfections were optimistically outlined in the book's preface.

Flecker spent most of the Christmas Vacation in Paris, but he stole a few days for London. He wrote to his father on the evergreen topic of reducing his own finances to order :—

"A thousand thanks for the cheque. I've got some from The *Nation* as well, which is fortunate.

I have paid, as the French say, enormously of bills. Whenever I am flush, my dear father, be sure that there is something wrong, and that I have not paid my bills : whereas, if I am broke, be sure it is honesty.

Have had a very pleasant time here, rather whirled about town. Have made some rather hopeful literary arrangements."

To his mother, he wrote a little more explicitly :—

"I am so sorry I have not written for so long. I am going to Paris to-morrow, where my address will be Hotel Jacob. It's a respectable, quiet and cheap hotel, on the left bank of the Seine, not far from the Louvre and the Quartier Latin. I hope to get hold of a Turk and talk to him in exchange for English. I shall not have a very gay time, I fear. We are not going to have any exam. till July.

J. may be in Paris for a week, and I know one or two students there."

Of this Paris time three postcards have been found. His anticipations of not having a gay time were fulfilled. He had influenza and on his first postcard lamented over ruinous doctors' bills; but kept himself going on hopes of friends arriving. His third card showed him to have recovered his normal condition :—

"Hotel Jacob,
Paris,
4. 1. 1910.

A thousand thanks for your New Year's message. I do hope you are much better and feeling chirpy. Am doing really quite a lot of work here as J. is in the Louvre all day. We have got a fine large room for 32 fr. 50, the fortnight between us. Not a large sum to spend on lodging is it? There is a fire-place and a big fire: my throat is very much better but not quite gone."

His first letter from Cambridge in the Lent Term was filled with forebodings on his financial prospects :—

"I foresee blue ruin approaching, for I shall have to spend so much on clothes and heaven knows what not—all necessary, both here and in Constantinople.

I would have written before, but I have been staying the week-end in London. They are really very nice to me. Went to *Tannhauser*, E. and I, and did many other pleasant things together. I shall be glad when Cambridge is done with. I think the exam. will be in May. Birrell is very keen on being best man."

In the middle of the term, he spent a few days in Paris. Writing to his mother, he said he was working very hard; that he must write to his old Uppingham tutor—"it appears my poems are somehow responsible for his being engaged"; that he thought both his French and Turkish were improving, that Nutt was treating with him about his Italian Grammar, and finally, what probably he cared most for, that he had had "a fine but not quite laudatory review in the *Morning Post* and quite horrid ones in *The Times* and *Scotsman*."

The "Italian Grammar" was published by Nutt in 1911, with the title of the *Scholar's Italian Book*. The precise date in 1910 when *Thirty-six Poems* was published seems now irrecoverably lost. The unbound sheets

were transferred in 1911 to Messrs. Dent, and with the addition of six poems—

Pillage,
The Ballad of Zacho,
Pavlovna in London,
The Sentimentalist,
Don Juan in Hell,
The Ballad of Iskander,—

appeared in that year as *Forty-two Poems*. The newspaper reviews Flecker mentioned must have been of the smaller book whose failure was, perhaps, mainly due to the financial collapse of the publishing firm.

In another letter to his mother he spoke again of his marriage :—

"It is very probable that after all we shall be married in June—in fact, all going well, it is certain. It certainly will be far more fun, but the difficulties are enough to frighten anybody.

E. is learning how five people can live on 30*s*. a week, with some Cousins at Barrow-in-Furness. It should prove to her a profitable if painful experience."

Some weeks later, writing to his mother about a review of *Thirty-six Poems* which she had sent him from a Cheltenham paper, he observed :—

"It is vastly amusing and impudent to a degree! It should sell any number—but I can't see why I should be accused of melancholy mysticism."

Into the midst of the rather humdrum endings of his Cambridge career, there burst suddenly a change of many of his plans. Without previous warning he announced that he was going to Paris. A very short letter, written almost immediately after, from Oxford, explained his reason :—

"I am afraid that marriage is off. We seem hopelessly incompatible. I shall be here till Tuesday, then I go to Paris."

At the outset it was not by his wish or doing that the engagement was broken. The next day after he wrote the above letter, he telegraphed to his parents from London—

"It may be alright. Roy."

But it was not "alright"; and his next letter announced that he must be alone, and that he had gone to Paris; it also contains the only account he is known ever to have given of the matter. For this reason it seems right to include it:—

"Oxford Union Society,
Tuesday.

My very dear Parents,

Somehow I funked coming home as I didn't want to talk about the matter, but to rush abroad at once. My address will be that I have already given you,

rue Perronet,
Neuilly-sur-Seine,
Paris,

where I am going to be housed for 50 fr. a month, and where I hope to get some good work done.

I have had too many warnings to be flung very badly in the matter, and (unofficially) I am sure we have done right. The history is simply this. E. is one of those people who cannot let themselves go and just be happy: she was extremely worrying about whether it would be alright, till I lost much of my affection for her: at Xmas she practically dismissed me: then called me back: after such treatment I began to feel that married life would *not* be a bed of roses. Then I went up to see her about the middle of the term: we bored each other, and I vowed to myself it would have to stop: that was when I wanted marriage put off: four days after I left she wired for me, imploring me to come up. She was a perfect dear, and asked me to marry her in June. I even resisted a little: finally we were quite happy together. She said there were to be no more flutters. When I went up on Friday, there were flutters—indeed, she was simply antipathetic to me—until we had decided to part, and then she and I had a crisis again—and she asked me to come back some day at least. And we parted like day-old lovers: but alas! What can one do!

I am writing this purposely to you in a tone as if I didn't care twopence and were rather relieved.

Frankly, there were two Es.—one I love and do still, and the other I hate as much as it hates me, and when the lovable one writes (as she will) to me, I don't know what I shall do. But it seems to me one dare not marry half a person. Alas! 'tis a strange world. Please write to me."

The letter is full of the childlike directness of vision and ingenuous simplicity which characterise all his

"personal" letters and home life in general. There is, besides, another quality in it, which accounts for what he called the "don't care twopence" tone. Flecker was, before all other things, what Shelley called a "maker"; to a very large extent Moréas' words were true of him:—

Puisque tout ici-bas ne survient que pour être
Un prétexte à tes chants.

At any rate, to him everything was from one aspect stuff for the creation of some understanding of life; which does not mean that he was a "message-monger," a rôle he definitely repudiated; but it does mean that he was steadfastly set on unravelling, so far as he could, the meaning and purpose of life. Had he not desired *rerum cognoscere causas*, he must have been devoid of dramatic power; as a matter of fact he was not only a lyrical but also a dramatic poet. Therefore bound up in him were the two qualities, so unlike, and, in combination, so puzzling, of intense, personal sensitiveness, with an ability at need to get as it were outside himself, and view his circumstances and himself in the middle of them much as he might any other human drama. The result is a strange medley of quick feeling, craving, as this letter shows, for sympathy, along with detached judgment. Neither quality was quite free to act, each being checked by the other.

For marriage to be a success, his wife would need not only unerring intuition, but the even rarer quality of sagacious unselfishness.

The causes of estrangement on his fiancée's side were not, as in a letter to his mother she generously declared, due to any fault of his. Her main trouble would appear to have been his utter absentmindedness, which might perhaps, at that particular time, have been rather more than usually obvious, owing to his anxiety about his professional work, and his literary chances. She quite evidently missed the intense, expressed admiration to which she was accustomed. He was in no sense a

society man; she was essentially a society woman. Sometimes, when absorbed in his own thoughts, he seemed entirely unaware that she was in the room.

A letter which his fiancée's mother wrote to Mrs. Flecker shows beyond any possibility of dispute that the fundamental cause of the break was simply temperamental incompatibility:—

"From your kind expression of sympathy for me, and the hope you express that Roy may not have been in any way to blame I fear that you did not quite understand that the breaking off of the engagement was solely and entirely E.'s doing. She had after much heart-searching and much doubt come to the conclusion that she did not love him sufficiently to marry him: and that she has seen this before it was too late, I can only be thankful for. I feel for Roy that it must seem hard on him just at present, but he is young and will—as I said to him—get over it. I have always liked Roy, and shall always feel a real affection for him."

The most reasonable view of the matter seems to be that the two were suddenly but only superficially attracted to each other. Closer acquaintance revealed their fundamental incompatibility, and it was well for them both that Flecker's fiancée had the courage to act. That she parted from him with difficulty is apparent in his inability to sever the tie whole-heartedly during the few following months. But the step having been taken he, partly with the help of circumstances, was able to hold to it, and it may fairly be said that neither was to blame, and honours were easy.

Nevertheless, that the "don't care twopence" strain was merely protective veneer is suggested by the two following letters written from Neuilly-sur-Seine, where he spent the Easter vacation:—

"A splendid place this for work, for it is duller than anything I have ever seen. E. wrote for me to come to her on my way to Paris, and was perfectly delightful—but alas! how long will she remain so? It was ever so nice of you to wire for me to come home: had to go to Paris immediately."

Flecker's capacity for being "very miserable" will not escape any reader of his letters. Bound up with it,

however, was a fundamental resilience. After a short time, the latter began to assert itself, as this rather obscure letter from Neuilly shows :—

" Very many thanks for your letter and for the cheque. I am afraid the bow[1] got mysteriously changed several years ago—it may be somewhere in the drawing-room perhaps—but I think it was at a shop in Oxford, and I couldn't get the bow back.

My devotion to others has been the curse of my life and the weakness of my character. This place is not so bad after all : heaps of French and decent food and tea. We talk nothing but French, and I do nothing but work. I have found a Turk who is going to give me lessons almost every day. I really ought not to do so very badly in my exam."

Enough has now been said to show that Flecker's Cambridge life was hardworking, and not out of the ordinary. At last the day came when he could write home :—

" Feel very blissful—exam. all over : did fairly well considering my small knowledge : afraid the vivas did not go off very well. Worked twelve hours a day during exam. ; six hours exam., six hours work ! "

He was successful in his examination, and he left Cambridge. Though his engagement had been definitely broken off, his fiancée continued to write to him, and to see him occasionally. She even still contemplated marriage. In an undated letter to his mother, which was evidently the day after he started for Constantinople, after thanking Mrs. Flecker for much kindness, she said :—

" Everything that has occurred was entirely due to me. However, Roy and I met again yesterday (I met him at Paddington and saw him off with the Charing X boat-train), and I should so like to come and explain everything to you if I may."

It was in June, 1910, that she saw him off to Constantinople, and she continued, for some time, to correspond with him, and once even promised to marry him in the

[1] This violin bow flits in and out of his letters from his Oxford days, and was never found. He sold, or contemplated the sale of this violin at Oxford.

following October. Of Flecker's Cambridge friends, some of whom Mr. Goldring mentions in his *James Elroy Flecker*,[1] probably Mr. Francis Birrell saw most of the Poet. He has written the subjoined estimate of Flecker as, through the mists of some years, he now appears to a contemporary :—

"I suppose that the most obvious thing about Flecker was the energy he threw into whatever he happened to be doing at the moment, were it learning a new language, punting a canoe, or working out a train of thought.

He was three parts the typical Englishman, and considerably less than a quarter the exotic, a pose he adopted more often in verse than in life.

His two poems *The Ballad of Hampstead Heath* and *I and my old friend the Sun* seem to me not necessarily his two best poems, but the two that represented best his normal point of view.

The East viewed from Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire as seen from the East, Piccadilly, Chastity, and Sin. This is all poetry. He liked Gloucestershire and the East, as all decent people must do ; and as for Piccadilly, Chastity, and Sin, well, they appealed to his sense of humour as grotesque and ridiculous conceptions, and made good copy for literature. Flecker was very literary and tremendously fond of words for their own sake. He wrote poetry about attractive words, rather than about attractive ideas.

On his death the *Nation* said of him: 'He was our most perfect craftsman since Tennyson,' and a less friendly critic once said to him, 'Your poetry stinks of the workshop of Rossetti.' Both these critics lay stress on hard work. And he did work tremendously hard, being carried along by his buoyant temperament, energy, and high spirits. Energy and high spirits are his two qualities that remain most distinctly in my mind. There is an idea abroad that he was a kind of twentieth century Oscar Wilde, holding dinner tables in thrall with a succession of dazzling epigrams. Nothing is further from the truth ; he emphatically was not at his best on these occasions.[2] He was at his best when energy and high spirits had their most normal outlet, on walking tours or at times when he punted a canoe miles away from Cambridge, where undergraduates very rarely get. He was interested in everything that came along, in bathing, sunlight, and the ordinary movements of the country side.

[1] Pp. 36–40.

[2] In view of Mr. Birrell's statement, it is perhaps interesting to record a quaint remark of Mr. Cooper's in a letter to Flecker's mother :—"His conversation has been described as witty. I never found him more witty than a man ought to be."

He was exciting society for a boy as I was when I first met him—I was nineteen—and he cannot have been twenty-four in 1908.[1] But as I knew nothing and had never been anywhere, except from London to Eton and back, he seemed to me incredibly informed and experienced, though I now see there was a good deal of undergraduate 'façade' about it. But, still, he was a first-rate linguist and capable of teaching a great deal to an ignorant boy like me. I suppose my *naïveté* was amusing and his preoccupation with the *bizarre* and grotesque was very sympathetic to me. I got to know him very well indeed at Cambridge, though afterwards he went abroad and I hardly saw him again, being at Munich when he came to England in 1912. So I cannot say anything about his final stages of development. It was only the Cambridge Flecker I knew, and though it was at Cambridge that he wrote much of his best poetry and came intellectually into his own, I doubt if he was ever really at home there.

Nursed in the vagabond camaraderie of Oxford, he never felt quite comfortable in the subfusc tones of Cambridge intellectual society. We all used to go in for being very classical and eighteenth century, and Flecker couldn't stand this.

I remember him holding forth one day on how in many ways Yeats was a better poet than Wordsworth, and getting seriously annoyed when no one was even willing to consider the proposition seriously. There were a few burrs off the Walter Pater hedgerows sticking obstinately on to his coat. He may have got rid of them eventually, though I doubt it. To have seen Flecker in his element, it was probably necessary to have known him at Oxford.

I prefer to remember him not as a wit, a child of brilliant culture, or an oriental sensualist, but as a hard-working straightforward person, fond of books and languages and physical exercises. Some of this energy may have been a reflex of the consumption that was in him.[2] But the fact that he died of consumption may strengthen another erroneous view—that he was a melancholy world-sick person lisping the lilies of French decadence, 'the lean and swarthy poet of despair' as he called himself in a very early effort. He had an outsider's amusement in decay—that is all.

This leads one to wonder whether, perhaps, amusement in the sense of tickling the intellectual palate wasn't really his main intellectual interest. He was apt in those days to be very self-conscious both in life and art, and easily to see himself up against a background. He stood apart from himself, and looked on as he made the *beau geste*. This sometimes became rather trying—but it was what made his researches amusing to himself and to others.

[1] Flecker was born in November, 1884, and therefore was 24.

[2] As a matter of fact there was no sign of consumption till 1911. He contracted the disease in Constantinople.

This word 'amusing' is occurring a good many times. But there is a truth behind it. Still, it was the amusement of a romantic, not of a Horace Walpole or a de la Rochefoucauld. He was essentially a romantic, amused at his own romanticism.

He hated religion in all its forms, and had no sympathy with the neo-Catholic movement which was making ravages round him; and perhaps he rather hated morality as well. But here he was a little self-conscious. He had a certain childish preoccupation with sin, which I suppose drifted along from Walter Pater.

I never saw him in 1914. But I am not surprised at his being patriotic. It was his British qualities coming out, something solid, almost commonplace, and one of its forms was a sentimental admiration for France. He liked French poetry from the outside as an Englishman likes it. What was un-English in him was a passion for form and a dislike of the encroachment of morality into the realms of art. This was probably why he disliked Wordsworth and thought Yeats a better poet. He said he was more 'intimate.' He talked a good deal about the visual arts. But he did not really care very much about them, at any rate not in the passionate way he cared about literature and words. He had a passion for words which was somewhat Elizabethan, if we may be excused for using a word which has become so stupidly fashionable. Yet his taste in words could be at fault and he got very angry when mocked at for taking the phrase 'collied night' out of the Midsummer Night's Dream and shoving it into a poem about nenuphars. He thought himself a very good poet, but if he asked your opinion was unusually willing to listen to the answer.

These remarks are very disjointed. But I write them down as they come into my head, trying to picture again a very vivid figure of my undergraduate days. His strange appearance, lean and dark, was brought out by a very unbecoming white blazer, trimmed with a bright yellow band, which was a relic of his Oxford days. I recall his room in Jesus Lane very well and the immense number of dictionaries on the walls, which enormously impressed my monoglot mind. Though modest, he had strange arrogancies and wanted half-seriously to bring out an anthology of all the best English poems, with improvements by himself.

One of his last efforts was the National Anthem rewritten for modern taste. He began a translation of Omar Khayyám to show what a bungler Fitzgerald was, and of Sindbad the Sailor to show up M. Mardrus. But to do him credit, these efforts always had merit. He was very angry with my undergraduate enthusiasm for Pope, whom he in turn could not appreciate, and was delighted to find something by him I did not know which he asserted to be better than any of his better known works. These were Pope's imitations

of Spenser, Dorset, and some other Caroline poets. He did not much appreciate what we dubbed the Johnsonian method of criticism being applied to his works. He was very proud of two lines in one of his poems—

'I know dead men are deaf and may not hear
The singing of a thousand nightingales.'

It was pointed out on this method, that what was wrong with dead men was that they could not hear one nightingale, and if they could hear a thousand, it would be extremely disagreeable. On the whole Flecker took this chaff with considerable good nature.

I said before that he took an interest in sin and he probably considered himself as a rather picaresque figure. But this was a literary conception of himself, of the artist as a young man. To my mind, he was essentially *rangé*, and the type of excellent husband and father. All the natural emotions were strongly developed in him. He loved his family and friends with a dog-like fidelity, and would put up with any beastliness on his friends' part, once he really liked them. He was sociable in the best sense of the word—that is to say, he wasn't in the least 'cliquey' and liked all sorts of people.

He was easily amused by the flavour of any particular mind. He could play up well to different sorts of people, not that he was insincere at all, but because his untiring curiosity made it easy for him to see into other people's point of view. He was not at all an academic person. He saw life very rich in colour and was not easily bored. I don't think he understood why other people got bored, or why everybody should not like everybody else. Hence, when he asked a lot of strange people down to Cambridge, he was annoyed that his Cambridge friends were too lazy to come round to Jesus Lane to look at them. He rather pictured himself as the centre of a circle, with amusing people turning up from all quarters to see him and being introduced by him to other amusing people. Also he would have liked to have been a draught, blowing the cobwebs out of his more academic friends' minds.

These ambitions of his were a misfortune. He would have been happier without them.

I remember well this boyish chagrin when some artist from Paris, or Oxford minor poet, had fallen flat.

He was not a complicated character, but fundamentally simple and boyish, with some of the vanities of boys, and an endless passion for talk. He talked as he wrote for the love of words and consciously amusing phrases. He was, above all things, a friend of the Grotesque. He had a rococo mind. One of his favourite classical books was *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius, which he began translating. He had a great love of translating. He liked

the steady labour entailed. Anyone who has read his poetry will be struck by the workmanlike translations from several languages. In an *abandon* of self-discipline he began translating into verse *The Seven against Thebes*—a task for which he was evidently unequipped.

But he would have surely been an excellent introducer of oriental literature to England, not that he had any real sensuous sympathy with the rich fatalism of the East, but because its strangeness and difference from us amused him so enormously. Take one of his most popular poems, *The Golden Journey to Samarkand*, and analyse the emotions behind it. It is a fundamentally intellectual effort by a vastly amused and intelligent spectator. The enormous bales of merchandise tickle the palate of the English traveller, accustomed to the sobriety of middle-class life in England.

He never could have been a Burton or been permanently happy in the East. He was too solidly English. For him the Orient was a 'Golden Journey to Samarkand,' not a place of residence. It was emphatically something to write home about, and he did write home about it much arresting verse.

Let us think of him as an Englishman, good natured, sociable, and energetic, but with an un-English passion for form and a real love of truth, both in life and in art."

As Mr. Birrell mentions two obituary notices of Flecker, it may be interesting to add the sentences referring to his literary achievement, which appeared in *The Times* on Jan. 6th, 1915 :—

"By his death there passes away a poet whose accomplished work was equalled by few of his coevals; his promise by still fewer. . . .

Normal scholarship did not interest him, but he had an extraordinary capacity for languages, European and Oriental. His conversation was variegated, amusing, and enriched with booty from the byways of knowledge. He was always and restlessly driven by his mind down such paths. He sought beauty everywhere, but preferred, for the most of his life, to find her decoratively clad. He loved England, Greece, and the East, always with more passion than affection. He had great vitality, screened by his uncommon sensitiveness, and scholarship qualified by a picaresque romanticism. . . . His work gained in strength and clearness as he went on, and his craftsmanship became singularly accurate."

CHAPTER VI

CONSTANTINOPLE

When, in June, 1910, Flecker went to the East, only four and a half years of life were still in store for him. In that short time the greater part of his most important literary work was created. *The Last Generation*, which is the best of his "fantastic" prose, though *N'Jawk*, some may think, is a dangerous competitor, had already been printed in its final form, for two years. He had previously published, in 1907, *The Bridge of Fire*. *Thirty-six Poems*, a re-issue of *The Bridge of Fire*, with a few omissions and additions, appeared during 1910.

In May, immediately before he left England, Flecker contributed one of the most delicately ironical of all his prose sketches, *Pentheus*, to the *Cambridge Review*. The perpetual re-incarnation through the ages of the opponent of "the long-haired, bright-cheeked stranger with the charm of Aphrodite in his eyes," was Flecker's theme. Perhaps only he could have turned Pentheus first into Pilate, and last, into the Apotheosis of British Public Spirit and Common Sense :—

> "I need only refer to my art galleries, to the royal academies, and to the great efforts I have made to provide all who come to the County Council schools with a sound grounding in English literature, starting with *Beowulf* and tracing the gradual development of idealism down to the death of Tennyson."

The Grecians, which has not yet been quite duly appreciated, was finished before he left England, and was published later in the year. All, it is hardly too much to say, therefore of his greatest work remained to be done, and that amidst the duties of a British official and the disabilities of recurring and grave illness.

In June he wrote to his mother from London, saying how sorry he was not to go down to Cheltenham for another farewell; but as he explained—

"I am so desperately hard at work doing this play of mine and so forth. I am only going away for fifteen months after all. . . . Thank you both ever so much for all the great kindness you have shown me, and for the outfit, which is a splendid one, and for the parting gifts."

His first letter from the British Consulate at Constantinople was dated July 2nd. It opened with somewhat startling news :—

"E. has wired (at my request) to say she will marry me in October—so that's all right—but please not a word to a soul till you hear from me again."

A week later he wrote that she had written, and sent him a beautiful new photograph of herself.

At first he had little or no work, as there was a doubt whether he should be sent to Sofia for four months, or put into a "pretty easy vacant job" at Constantinople.

He wrote home, asking for a saddle and bridle :—

"The Turkish truck is useless, and nearly slays the horse. . . . I was nearly clawed to bits by the protruding buckle of a Turkish saddle."

His only other complaint dealt with Turkish coinage, which he described as being in a state of chaos :—

"You lose every time you change . . . a Turkish franc or cherek, as it's called—you lose half!! Also when you change a Turkish pound, or a Medjidieh, which is 3s. 6d."

Until the question of his post was settled, he amused himself with visits, and playing games, in the intervals of the only work which was required of him :—

"The Turkish paper, which the Government makes me look through daily, keeps me pretty busy, I can tell you."

By the end of July he was, as he told his parents, running a Vice-Consular office at Constantinople by himself. He added :—

"I am not doing all the Vice-Consular work. I have to keep the accounts of the entire Consulate. . . . The work is dull, rather a

responsibility, but some days there is nothing whatever to do, and I just sit reading a book."

He complained of the difficulty of getting "consecutive English news," and begged that the middle page of the *Daily Mail* might be posted to him every day. "A *Punch*," he remarked, "would be a godsend."

But, as a rule, his official work kept him very busy, specially the financial part of it. He accounted for this by pointing out that "It's the most complicated money system in the world, and the worst." Moreover, he was not temperamentally a postmaster of accounts.

There were countervailing advantages. He had found rooms at Candilli, where he was comfortable and content. In a letter, written in August, he said: "If all the Service consisted of Candilli, 'twould be a very pleasant life indeed." From his window he looked across the Bosphorus to Roumali Hissar.

He sent a short article, *Candilli*, which was published in the autumn, to *The Westminster Gazette*; it has been republished in *Collected Prose*. The little sketch of the panorama, spread out before him, begins :—

"I have been staring for hours out of my window to-day."

It is a seductive picture he drew, ending thus :—

"And now darkness is here with her fixed and trailing stars, and the whole European shore is ablaze from Therapia to Stamboul: the Muezzin has cried from his little minaret, the Ottoman night has begun."

But Flecker found all of it too seductive. He turned from what he called "this terrible and malignant beauty that saps body and soul," and cried out—

"For a slag-heap, or a gas-work or any strong, bold, ugly thing."

So soon did the East repel him; for it is quite certain that though fully aware of its fascination, he hated it, probably most of all for its cruelty, and hated it the more the better he knew it. In 1913 he wrote to Mr. Savery: "I loathe the East and the Easterns. . . .

Yet it seems—even to hardened Orientalists—that I understand."[1]

Though, through this intuitive distrust, the beauty of Candilli disturbed him, yet much of his life was satisfying: "There is bathing, tennis, riding, and I am beginning to read books that had long stood on my shelves untouched."

So far as anyone could see, he was about really to come into his own. He had found a profession, and he did not object to the sort of work it entailed, even when he recorded such facts as: "Have had to settle a dispute to-day between a horrid Maltese and a Greek, and am very exhausted." He was but slightly troubled by a letter from Bavaria, in which his former fiancée seemed still to be contemplating their marriage. Leisure for literary pursuits was once more within his reach, and with all this he had plenty of time for recreation with his colleagues and with some Greek friends whom he had met on the boat on his way out; going with them for delightful picnics, once "up the sweet waters of Asia—a little river not far from Candilli." *Saadabad* recalls those long sweet summer days of his early official life:—

Down the Horn Constantinople fades and flashes in the blue,
Rose of cities dropping with the heavy summer's burning dew,
. . . . . .
Broken fountains, phantom waters, nevermore to glide and gleam,
From the dragon-mouth in plaster sung of old by old Nedim,
Beautiful and broken fountains, keep you still your Sultan's dream,
Or remember how his poet took a girl to Saadabad?

To add one last touch to all these sources of content came the pleasure, so acute to a young writer, who was far too genuine to indulge in any sort of *blasé* pose, of "reviews":—

"My *Poems* are still being reviewed, and dear old Haines of Uppingham wrote to congratulate me on my review in *The Spectator*. The oddest provincial journals review me. I really ought to be selling a few. I've had more reviews than any book of poems for many a day, and better ones."

[1] *James Elroy Flecker*, by D. Goldring. Pp. 94, 95.

Young Cambridge, among the rest, was keeping alert eyes on this late sojourner in their midst. *The Granta* wrote :—

"These *Poems* . . . have already received favourable notice in the columns of public journals; it remains for us but to give our complete assent."

Nevertheless, the reviewer proceeded to discrimination rather than to wholesale assent. He cast aside the "verses of a sacred nature," of which in later life Flecker himself wrote duly disparagingly. He criticised many others, and finally gave unequivocal praise to three poems whose excellence is now generally acknowledged :—

"Turning to poems of a totally different nature, *The Queen's Song* is a very delicate piece of work. The idea of the power that was given to Midas being employed to produce æsthetic pleasure is very fascinating.

The Welsh Sea deserves special mention; upon reading it one is immediately carried back to times long past and picture after picture floats before the eye. . . .

A very slight poem, entitled *Tenebris Interlucentum* possesses rare beauty. . . .

Mr. Flecker's development will be interesting to watch, for development there most assuredly should be."

So, in all these many directions, everything was going well with him, for what more could he desire than to be safely started in an honourable career, to have, once more, some leisure for literature, that leisure which once he feared academic failure had destroyed, and to have received some public acknowledgments of his poetic gifts? His general happy content culminated in a letter, dated September 13th. After mentioning that he had "just recovered from a slight fever," he wrote :—

"The picnic was splendid: we went to the shore of the Black Sea and bathed in real waves. It was lovely to see a nice clean sea with waves and a tide and sand and a beach, for the Bosphorus is much more like a river, and Marmora like a lake."

Then upon all that dawning happiness the doom fell. He had ridden to the picnic along the shore in great heat,

and when he arrived, then and there he plunged into the Black Sea's cold waters. So the "splendid picnic" and the sea, which in infancy he loathed, were by the irony of things changed into the beginning of the end. Three days later he wrote to his father :—

"I am afraid as usual that I am going to be an awful nuisance to you and everybody else.

To go straight to the point, the doctor has discovered germs of consumption in me. He says I must take sick-leave and consult a specialist at once. . . .

It's the greatest shock I've ever had. I'm unutterably miserable, but the doctor says I can get cured. Please write at once in answer."

He wrote this letter from hospital in Constantinople. In rather less than a week his temperature had fallen, and he wrote next from the Marseilles Paquet Boat, on September 22nd, to say that he ought to reach London in about six days. His spirits had to a great degree recovered, and he closed his letter with the remark that—"This boat is very fine and splendid and comfy."

When he landed he went straight to stay with his Aunt Rachel and her husband, who were then living in Sydenham. His invincible optimism had reasserted itself, and from their house he wrote to his mother :—

"I will go to the specialist Wednesday, and stay here till then. I am feeling very well, although the crossing was the worst I have ever known, seven hours instead of three and a half! Yet I was not ill a bit.

Do you know we had a collision in the Mediterranean, very near thing. . . .

The voyage worked marvels for me, I expect that is all I want. I am going to kick against sanatoria. Why go to one of those little funnels of infection? I am far too healthy. A cottage with a balcony in good air—books—heaps to eat—with a good doctor near to treat me from time to time: that's all I want. However, I expect I'd best see that specialist.

Auntie met the train which was awfully good of her."

He went with his father and mother to the specialist, who found nothing actively wrong with him then. But in view of the Constantinople doctor's bacteriological

report, and of Flecker's remarkable thinness after being for only three months in the East, he advised three months in the sanatorium at Cranham, in the Cotswolds, since it was in the country Flecker loved, and close to his home. This treatment was to be consolidated by six months' rest and travel in some fresh, open country.

Some of Flecker's instincts would appear to have been valuable indications of the best courses for him. For example, his congenital loathing of the sea, and fear of water generally, was deliberately, and as it was thought educationally, set aside; he was induced, not without suffering, to overcome it, until hatred turned into affection. Yet, the swim in the Black Sea was the predisposing cause of fatal illness. Again, as he told his parents, he disliked the mere notion of "one of those little funnels of infection."

On the other hand, it was not always easy for those about him to distinguish sound, even prophetic, instincts from passing and half-wilful impulses. Also, as concerning the prescribed six months to establish his health, he sometimes, when forced to yield to a plan, wrecked it by breaking it off half-way through. Anyhow, his instinct against any sanatorium developed into detestation of the particular one in practice. The restrictions of an institution irked him. Also, he persisted in sitting with other patients if they chanced to interest him, no matter how advanced was the stage of their illness.

He wore through the three months as best he could, reading, writing, seeing his parents and friends, and walking about the Cotswold country. Cranham itself is a small place in the midst of beechwoods. Not more than four or five miles away was Painswick Beacon; six miles off was Haresfield, on an out-lying spur of the Cotswold range, whence he could see across the Severn Valley to the Forest of Dean lying due west, and to the Malvern Hills on the north.

Oak and Olive belongs to this time so far as it is

concerned with his own country ; and the time could not have been one of undiluted boredom and fretting :—

When I go down the Gloucester lanes
My friends are deaf and blind :
Fast as they turn their foolish eyes
The Maenads leap behind,
And when I hear the fire-winged feet,
They only hear the wind.

Have I not chased the fluting Pan
Through Cranham's sober trees?
Have I not sat on Painswick Hill
With a nymph upon my knees,
And she as rosy as the dawn,
And naked as the breeze?

At the end of the time there was a marked, even an extraordinary improvement, in his health. Then and there his acquiescence suddenly broke down. Though plans were made for him for a travelling holiday during the prescribed six months, he swept them all out of his path, even one which provided him with a cousin of Wilson the Explorer as a companion in Norway first and then in Switzerland. Although this young man had had a similar attack to Flecker's, so that it might have seemed a mutually accommodating and certainly not a burdensome arrangement, he would have none of it; nor was he to be moved even by the reminder that this suggested companion was related to the editor of the *Athenæum*.

Declaring that it was "absurd to take any further precautions," he left for Paris. Mademoiselle Skiadaressi, whom he had met on the boat as he went out to Constantinople, was staying in Paris with her mother and brother. There Flecker remained through February and March, writing home, after a time, that he was absolutely well, and was expecting to be appointed acting Vice-Consul in Smyrna. He was delighted with that prospect.

At Cranham he had been at work on his play, *Don Juan*, and while enjoying himself in Paris he finished it.

Early in February he wrote to his mother, obviously in answer to apprehensive remonstrances :—

"Pray be reassured, I am absolutely well. The time I was to stay in the sanatorium was only till January was out, and at all events I shall probably go to the King's San. at Hemel Hempstead on my return, to get weighed, to get some good air and get doctor's opinion about returning."

The fact was that Flecker felt well, and with his usual zest for catching the flying moment of content his real interests were anywhere but among the details of health. He went on, in this letter, to tell his mother that—

"The long book-review in *The English Review* this month (Courthope and Arthur Symons) unsigned, is by me. Please tell Mr. Cooper."

This article[1] has been republished in *Collected Prose*. It is an interesting piece of work, not mainly because it is one of his earliest critical essays, but far more for its daring condemnation of a late Oxford Professor of Poetry, and for its real width of view. He first attacked Professor Courthope frontally :—

"He estimates poets by their influence rather than by their merit, this is excusable : but to estimate their merit by their influence, to allow direct literary criticism to be coloured by the contemporary importance or posthumous popularity of the poet, is not excusable."

Still more damagingly, in praising another writer, he dealt him an indirect blow :—

"Mr. Arthur Symons, on the other hand, prefers poetry to politics, and his book though neither great criticism nor great literature is superior to that of Mr. Courthope both in matter and manner."

This young David was not twenty-six when he thus went forth with his few polished pebbles to smite Goliath.

Writing about Mr. Symons' *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry* he observed : "It is too often forgotten that though artists may be very bad critics, they are the

[1] *The English Review*, February, 1911.

only people really fit to criticise." If this is compared with a sentence in another article, *The Public as Art Critic*, the two will supply an excellent instance of the contradictions of which Flecker was so cheerfully capable :—

"The critic must be of purer mould than the poet himself."

Elsewhere, in the same article, he declared :—

"Criticism is almost as difficult as creation, and there is no royal road to the comprehension of the beautiful."

Early in March, 1911, Flecker was back in London, and wrote to his mother about his literary prospects :—

"I have got no less than five appointments to-morrow, including one with the Director of the Haymarket. Of course, I shan't get him to do the play, but it's a great thing to have secured the appointment. Bernard Shaw read the play and wrote to me that I was a genius if inexperienced, so I am rather pleased.

It seems the novel will be published at last.[1] Also, my poems are being transferred to another publisher."[2]

The English Review for March contained *The Ballad of Iskander*, which must always remain one of his most characteristic poems. It with *Pillage*, *The Ballad of Zacho*, *Pavlovna in London*, *The Sentimentalist*, and *Don Juan in Hell* were added to *Thirty-six Poems* to make the new volume published by Dent, later in 1911, under the title of *Forty-two Poems*.

The table of contents in *Collected Poems* has a dividing line through it, though it is unmarked, after *The Ballad of Iskander*. Before that line, with the exception of the *Juvenilia* and some nine other early poems, are to be found all the poems published by Flecker in volume form between 1907 and 1911. After that imaginary line is to be found his great, his maturest work, which appeared in *The Golden Journey* and in *The Old Ships*, during the period 1913 to 1916.

While he was still in London after his Paris visit, reviews he had written were published in *The Cambridge*

[1] *The King of Alsander*. Actually it did not appear till 1914.
[2] *Thirty-six Poems* were transferred, in unbound sheets, from the Adelphi Press to Messrs. J. M. Dent and Sons.

Review of March 9th, 1911. One was on Monypenny's *Life of Disraeli;* the other on Mr. Douglas Goldring's *Country Boy.* In the Disraeli review there occurs this interesting vindication of a much criticised public figure :—

" The modern idea seems to be that a man cannot be a dandy and honest, nor a wit and affectionate. Indeed, Mr. Chesterton, that eminent Anglo-French author, talking about Dickens' pose, says, 'he did not pose like Disraeli; he was too clean for that.' This volume demonstrates the cruel absurdity of this remark. The young Disraeli has nothing whatever surreptitious or unpleasant about him : he appears as a devoted friend, an affectionate son and brother, careless of money, stainlessly honourable in all his business dealings, despite a desperate load of debt, and, on careful scrutiny, marvellously consistent in his politics. He was desperately conceited—but his conceit was joyous and boyish, without pompousness, and he was as enthusiastic for his friends as for himself."

Here, as always, Flecker was defending brilliancy from the blundering attacks of dullness, or of criticism which chose for the moment to ally itself with or masquerade as dullness.

Half-way through March, with no apparent recollection of doctors or sanatoria, Flecker announced in a very short letter to his mother, written from Paris, that he was starting in six days by the Marseilles Paquet Boat for Constantinople, where he hoped to arrive by the end of the month. On March 31st he wrote again to his mother from Constantinople :—

" I have been definitely appointed to Smyrna. I shall be there at least five months, possibly eight, and shall leave in a few days, so write to me to the above address. I am in splendid health, and thoroughly enjoying a visit to Constantinople, for I have nothing whatever to do at all but see numerous friends. I shall not be acting Vice-Consul till June, when the Consul-General leaves. I am perfectly busy, however, with my writing : I have a perfectly terrific amount of work to do in that line."

The rest of the letter is filled with details about the packing of his possessions, and ends with a gay request for " as many ¼-lb. tins of tobacco as you like . . . as one can get nothing but the most horrible Navy-cut

here." Less than a fortnight after, in his accustomed way of launching bombs into the family circle, he wrote to tell his mother that "after the reflection of many months," he was about to marry Mademoiselle Skiadaressi "as soon as I possibly can." He added that no intention of the sort had been arrived at in Paris. The letter was very brief and rather helter-skelter, which he excused on the ground that he had "been looking all over the place for a wee house"; and he ended with the rather Hibernian remark, "This is a healthy place if one lives outside it." But once again his hopes and plans were frustrated. He had, as has been said, flouted the specialist's warning that after the apparent cure at Cranham a further period of six months was desirable, and even imperative, for the settling of his health.

Presumably as a consequence of taking the law into his own hands he was, on May 1st, compelled once more to write from the British Consulate at Smyrna to his mother and father, announcing a relapse :—

"All my life is utterly ruined; I've broken down with consumption again, can't get away, mustn't marry. . . . Simply don't know what to do. . . .

It's apex of my left lung—same as before. Curable. But in how many years? How can I ever get well? No danger imminent, so don't fear."

No doubt the plain answer of common sense was—See a specialist and then do what you are told. But artistic ability and pedestrian wisdom are unusual yokemates. Flecker had an abundance of good sense, and a penetrating judgment as his literary criticisms not seldom show, but about himself and his own most vital needs both, sometimes, unaccountably failed.

Not only for those who loved him, whether those most nearly related to him, or that circle of friends which he made wherever he went, but also for English literature, the tragic fact remains that in all probability his life was quite unnecessarily cut off with that premature relentlessness. He need not have plunged into an ice-cold

sea when he was intolerably hot. Even after that, the consequences were reparable if only he could have been brought to believe that drastic self-sacrifice and control of immediate desires were absolutely essential to a permanent cure.

The Smyrna doctor recommended Zante, and Flecker stayed for a while at Athens in the hope that his friends might be able to go with him to Zante. While he was waiting at Athens for sick-leave, he spent most of his time sailing about the Gulf of Ægina. Half-way through May it occurred to him to consult an Athens specialist, who told him that there was very little at all the matter with him. At once, his spirits bounded up :—

" I'm rather irritated with the Smyrna people for frightening me to death. . . . I believe the whole business could have been stopped with two pennyworth of iodine and some terebinth inhalation. . . . The Athens air is marvellous."

Another letter, written two days later, on a Saturday, rebutted his parents' suggestions that his relapse was due to his neglect of the London specialist's advice ; and he declared that he was very well, and was going " to be married on Thursday." [1]

Once more the clouds had cleared, and in his boyish fashion, under a sunny sky, he was full of fun again. He was, of course, to be married according to the Greek Rite, and he said :—

" All sorts of dreadful things will happen at the wedding. I shall have a wreath tied on my head and be given away by a Ministress of Public Instruction. I hope this will reach you just on the day."

The only remaining trouble was that his " leave " had not arrived. However, even that seemed to him of little account. If it were refused, he proposed to go back to Smyrna and begin his work ; if it were granted, it could all be spent as a honeymoon, first at Corfu, and when that became too hot, as the season advanced, in Italy.

The wedding was solemnised on May 25th, 1911.

After all, leave was granted, and Corfu turned out to be

[1] He was actually married before this letter reached Cheltenham.

everything he had hoped. He admitted that it was hot, but he insisted on its great merit of slight difference between day and night temperatures. They remained there till July. Flecker did not write many, nor important, letters in those weeks.

The time he saved from correspondence he expended on that little group of poems which are saturated with the atmosphere which surrounded him, when, for once, he had " the time and the place and the loved one altogether."

He might later pour scorn on—

Had I that haze of streaming blue,

but it belongs to what in a letter he called " this Phæacian Island." He wrote those lovely lines—

The grave and gentle Peleus came
To the shore where the halcyon flies
To wed the maid of his devotion,
The dancing lady with sky-blue eyes,
Thetis, the darling of Paradise,
The daughter of old Ocean.
Seas before her rise and break,
Dolphins tumble in her wake
Along the sapphire courses ;
With Tritons ablow on their pearly shells
With a plash of waves and a clash of bells
From the glimmering house where her Father dwells
She drives his white-tail horses !

There, on the western shores of Greece, he delighted in and stored up those pictures of ethereal beauty which he set like cameos in *Hyali*, in *Santorin* for which he cared so much, and in *A Ship, an Isle, a Sickle Moon.*

Once, in July, in a letter home, he mentioned that he had received £5 for an unsigned review of J. C. Snaith, which had been published that month in *The English Review.* He also said that " two poems . . . are appearing in *The English Review* in September. . . . Otherwise, business is slow, but I am trying America."

To his surprised disgust, he had been put on half-pay while he was on sick-leave, but he was still full of cheeriness : " You should taste the marmalade," so he wrote,

"we make from fresh bitter oranges from our garden." The said review on the novels of J. C. Snaith is interesting. Flecker swept away four of them from the standpoint of literature, though he admitted that they were amusing and well-written. Of the rest, he wrote: "He has given us only three books that are literature, and only one masterpiece—*William Jordan, Junior*. But that work is unique, and it *is* a masterpiece, and it is all but unknown."

Flecker's real work was poetry, not writing about other people's books, and these reviews, however just and shrewd, were of the nature of pot-boiling. One of the two poems which appeared in the September number of *The English Review* was *The Dying Patriot*. During July he wrote to his old friend, Mr. Cooper, of a multitude of his literary efforts. He recommended to his notice the Snaith review, and after some details of his health, of the "idyllic cottage," and of a proposed journey to Italy, he added:—

"I have been troubled with so many things lately that I could not find time to write—and through that, I do nothing whatever all day in this Phæacian Island. Of course, it is still harder to do anything at all. However, I have begun another play, entirely in verse, on a sort of fantastic *Arabian Nights* scheme.[1] *Don Juan* has been revised, and I hope to hear good news of it from a lessee, sooner or later. Both Bernard Shaw and Trench of the Haymarket commended it, which was a good beginning.

I have not written anything at all really for months.

Idleness and the heat and the buzzing of flies here completely overcome me, so I will bid you farewell."

Mr. Cooper had known Flecker from infancy, and had watched his development as affectionately as if he were, in fact, as he was to all intents and purposes, one of his home circle. Evidently, he wrote again to Flecker soon after *The Dying Patriot* appeared in September. For one cause or another, the Poet did not answer till November, and then he wrote, as he was asked to do, an explanation of the poem which has puzzled some others too:—

[1] The first draft of *Hassan*.

"British Consulate General,
Beirut.

23/11/11.

Dear Mr. Cooper,

I have been a long time in answering your letter, but as I have latterly been inflicted with my intermediate exam., perhaps you will forgive me.

I never thought of the metre of *The Dying Patriot*, and how can I explain it? To compare small things with great, how would you scan Tennyson's

'*Break, Break, Break on thy cold grey stones, O Sea.*'

The metre of my poem is surely trochaic (I have not got it here unfortunately, as I am writing from the Consulate). But surely the basis is trochaic,

/ / / / / / /
—Beauty she was statue cold—there's blood upon her gown—

with an irregular short line. But certainly, the end lines seem to be more anapæstic and dactylic. The whole question of such rhythms is a hard one, and Saintsbury alone could explain them properly.

∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ —
Where the dead | robed in red |
/ / /
With the sea | weed ov | erhead

is anapæstic, for in all English anapæstic measures a ∪ — (iambus) is a correct resolution of an anapæst. (See the greatest English Anapæstic lyric in Swinburne's *Atalanta*.)

∪ ∪ — ∪ — ∪ ∪ — —
'When the hounds | of spring | are on win | ter's tra | ces.'

Also, in English there may always be in trochaic metres what Saintsbury calls a base foot (anakrousis) at the beginning of a line, one syllable forming a foot to itself—

— — —
Noon | *breaks on | England.*

As for the meaning, I was surprised the *E.R.* took that poem instead of other poems from the *Don Juan* play, which I sent on, as it is a little obscure. The patriot has been shot: and as he dies, very *mistily* he thinks of England from East to West—Dover suggests Augustine to him—its most important connexion with English History. Oxford is in the middle of England, and he mixes it madly with the sun voyaging over England—and the blood is suggested by his own blood and is a piece of mental wandering, quite in keeping dramatically, but I admit puzzling out of its context.

Floral air—is after all a very ordinary expression for sweet or

flower-scented air, and you can smell it in the Lime Walk of Trinity Quad any spring day.

Feet of snow—I'd forgotten; just symbolic of the purity of Augustine's fervour—and mind you he was probably barefoot.

Surely you know the legend of the drowned lands off Wales—or rather the fact that large parts of Carnarvon Bay were submerged. The patriot is dying in London at night, and thinks of the parts of the Empire that are in sunrise. The chill of death suggests to his wandering fancies the Hebrides and the cold seas: for you see the poem is dramatic and not lyrical.

Sorry at all events it gave you so much trouble. I can write no more now. My new Italian *Anthology* (Nutt's, 3*s.* 6*d.*) is out. I have quarrelled with the publisher and have no copy to send you.

I find some fossils here from time to time. Wish I knew something of the geology of the Lebanon.

Ever yours and many thanks for all your interest in me,

H. E. Flecker."

On August 16th Flecker wrote to his mother to tell her that he and his wife were "just off alas! from our dear cottage." They were going to Athens *en route* to Smyrna. He said they had, a few days before, had "a glorious sail," but the careless boatman had almost upset them—

"No danger for us, but we had a lot of money on us, as we had just been to the bank."

At the end of the letter he said that he had finished the first act of his new play. So his idleness had not been so complete as he led Mr. Cooper to suppose.

At the end of August he sent a hurried line from Athens, announcing a change of plans. After all he had been posted to Beirut, and so they were going there via Alexandria and Jaffa instead of to Smyrna. So far, his official life, from June, 1910, to August, 1911, had not amounted to anything very important. The useful and excellent work which he did as Vice-Consul, work in which he took great pride, was done at Beirut between September, 1911, and March, 1913, though in December, 1912, he had one month's leave which he spent in Paris and London; except for some time in Cheltenham.

One important part of his literary work which appeared in 1911 he mentioned to Mr. Cooper, *The Scholar's Italian Book*. It is important in itself, and as yet another instance of Flecker's manifold interests. He was before all else a poet. But outside the realm of poetry proper he rendered much other literary service, not least in this so-called "grammar," which recalled the mediæval meaning of the word, and in his fine plunge into educational doctrine, *The Grecians*.

CHAPTER VII

BEIRUT

FLECKER, after these short sojourns in Turkey and Greece, was now for about a year and a half to make his home in Syria.

His marriage had been suddenly decided on, as the medical report seemed to justify it; and, after the three months' leave in Corfu where *Hassan* was planned and begun in earnest, the first few weeks at Beirut were a medley of settling in, official work, paying duty-calls, and sending thanks for inevitably belated wedding presents. His earliest impressions of Beirut seem to have been written to Mr. Cooper at the end of September in 1911. After expressing delighted thanks for a beautiful piece of Coalport china, he continued :—

"The country, behind Beirut, the Lebanon, is rather splendid, and we have been staying up there some time: but as I have to be often at the Consulate, I have now come down, and we have found a very good place near the sea. . . . It is not as nice as Smyrna, the town is so filthy, but it's a pleasant place all the same.

I hope you will write to me from time to time, as it's a great pleasure to receive letters, especially from you. I am rather busy, being acting Vice-Consul and also having to work for an examination: after my exam. in the beginning of November, I shall be freer. Indeed, we hope to have a look at Damascus, which is just over the hills. Cairo we have seen; it is a much more fascinating place than I ever thought it would be."

Scenery all his life through mattered incalculably to Flecker, and it was among his consolations in Beirut's discomforts. Everyone who has heard so much as his name knows *Brumana*, full of the beauty of the Lebanon, of remembrances of his Hampshire pines, saturated with home-sickness. Yet every walk and drive about the country gave him pleasure; the scenery, the gorgeous carpet of flowers caught his alert senses, and drove care away in sunshine hours.

A place which specially took his fancy was the Dog River (the ancient Lykos). One Sunday at the end of October, 1911, he wrote :—

"We stayed at Areiya with the Consul-General for the second time last week-end, but this week-end we just went for the day along the coast to a place called the Dog River, about ten miles away by train. Very charming and pretty, with Assyrian figures cut on the rocks, and . . . wild cyclamen in bloom, narcissus, crocus, and many strange flowers, as, for instance, the one of which I send you a pressed one.

We are going to try and grow a cyclamen bulb in a pot. It's very fine the vegetation now, as there have been two rains ; and the banana trees and pomegranate trees are looking very fresh and green. The date-palms are heavy with fruit and we often have fresh dates, which are very nice things."

In a later letter he spoke of the Dog River flowing through "a very beautiful valley."

On November 18th, he recorded that they went to a very charming place, "Mamettein, where there's a beach, waves, and a little hotel" ; so he bathed. Areiya he particularly liked ; so they found a little house on the mountain, and spent part of 1912 there. His poem on it tells everything that need be said. Writing on April 1st, just of a Sunday walk, his pleasure in the country was so intense that it seems alive now, more than twelve years after, in the description he wrote :—

"Last Sunday we had a marvellous walk about three miles from Beirut, along the valley of the Beirut River. I have never seen such flowers. Red anemones and red ranunculus (flowers very like anemones) and very beautiful orchids (large varieties of the wild orchid at home), a sort of pink primrose and all sorts of strange marvels."

Flecker was not, as once in a later letter he lamented, a trained botanist or he would have known the relationship between anemones and ranunculus, and that there are at least sixteen British *species*, and not merely "the wild orchid at home." Once again, and it is more important than botanical details, he showed, as he had done over the Assyrian carved figures, how much more he

cared for wild Nature than for man's busy handiwork, when he described a visit to Jebail :—

"Very weird place on the sea. There's a cliff there, and when you dig in it, it's full of prehistoric pottery and other dull objects."

So far as social life went Flecker seems to have found Beirut tolerable. It was not altogether an easy place in the matter of provisioning, an essential part, after all, of social life. As a way out he, from time to time, sent home long lists of desirable eatables, which were in due time despatched to him. Once, as he was not a house-keeping expert, he had a surprise. He set his heart on a ham and a small piece of bacon for frying. The latter he happened to refer to as a side. So his mother sent a side. In his next letter he said :—

"We have got rid of most of the bacon[1]: we shall get rid of the ham another way, by eating it. Both are excellent."

Apparently, however, there were not enough handy recipients, for a few days later he lamented :—

"The pig is an awful incubus; but we are having him (ham!) fried for breakfast."

Flecker, of course, was not a north countryman, or he need not have waited till he was twenty-eight to learn the merits of fried ham.

In the British Syrian Mission he met old friends in the persons of several former members of the Cheltenham Ladies' College. As he had not forgotten how to play a piano, and his wife was a violinist, the Mission's musical meetings offered them very welcome entertainment. Flecker constantly wrote home for this or that of his ancient music still left at Dean Close School. Beirut Society was naturally cosmopolitan. The Italian Vice-Consul, his predecessor and wife, a Polish doctor, the Consuls at Aleppo and Damascus, the American Consul, "a young fellow from Magdalen College, Lawrence, who is going out to Carchemish to dig for Hittites . . . an enthusiast for literature which is rare in Beirut," all

[1] By distributing chunks as presents to his friends.

these and others, too, flit across the pages of his home letters. Occasionally, he recorded some official festivity :—

"The Governoress General of the Lebanon is getting up amateur theatricals to add to the confusion";

and again :—

"Everybody in Beirut is getting up plays, and I am acting in two and a pantomime, which keeps me abominably busy. Life is quite gay lately. Large dance with Cotillon the other night, at Governor-General's, was quite fun. Also many dinners."

Once in a way he sketched a *ménage* :—

"The Consul at Damascus . . . has an Italian wife, and they kept an entire menagerie at the Consulate—ostrich, gazelle, parrots, cat, heaven knows what";

or let slip funny little details of his official work :—

"A great friend of mine, one of the Judges of the Supreme Consular Court at Constantinople, is coming here to-day, to try the gentleman what bit off the nose of his lady. I have charge of the case, which is onerous."

In December, 1911, he wrote :—

"My predecessor is here on his way to Phillipopoli, whither he has been transferred. Of my successor not a word, and in any case I expect he will be going on leave."

The length of Flecker's term of office at Beirut was undetermined. Very soon after the above he wrote again :—

"My successor appeared here while we were at Damascus, and immediately went on leave. So I shall stay here for another four months, at least, in all probability, and on the whole I am glad as we are comfy. We have just had electric light put in the hotel."

In another letter, of December 11th, he observed :—

"I had to cut this letter short yesterday and go and arrest two deserters on a British boat. I must cut it short again because I have a good deal of work to do here in the Consulate."

The most exciting episode of his Consular experience was the war in October, 1911, between Turkey and Italy. His first reference to it was short :—

"Just a line as you may be interested to hear from me, as Turkey

is at war with Italy. It seems the Powers are only too pleased to let the Turks have a trouncing: they haven't got a ghost of a chance. The Turkish fleet was here the other day, with its English officers, who had many curious tales to tell. The Turks say, 'Wait a year or two and we'll see where England is.' The two old tin cans they got from Germany are totally useless. It seems the fleet was ordered back to Constantinople on Monday by a cipher telegram: but the Admiral had lost his code, and omitted to coal. After taking military possession of the telegraph office to send more code telegrams, they finally sailed on Thursday instead.

All the lights are out in all Turkish lighthouses. The Germans are protecting the Italians in Turkey. I was afraid we were going to, which would mean an awful amount of extra work."

So far Flecker evidently regarded the whole thing as a kind of joke. But one day in February it nearly became serious. A telegram arrived at Dean Close School with the brief message, "I am safe and well." His parents had no clue to its meaning, until, a few days later, a letter arrived in which he said :—

"At last, just before the mail goes I've got a moment to write to you. We have had quite an exciting time. All the details you will see in the papers.

I was woken up by a shot, and looked out of my window and saw an Italian warship there. Had a ticklish drive up to the Consulate, when the great ships began firing on a wretched little gunboat in the port, among a panicky population: on my way back more ticklish drive still, when despite of the Cavass, my carriage (I was with the Russian Vice-Consul) was stopped by an armed mob, and we were only rescued by two valiant soldiers, and the name of England which I repeated in my best Turkish. The two soldiers got on our carriage facing backwards and levelled their rifles against the mob. . . . Much as I love the Italians, and little of a Pacifist as I am, there was something brutal, because so stupid, in putting a whole town into panic to destroy a wee gunboat and wee-er torpedo-boat, which couldn't hurt a flea. Also, their shooting was vile; they never gave the boats time to surrender: they had to bombard three times before sinking 'em: besides killing fifty sailors, they killed about 100 people on the quay (the boats were *in* the harbour), they gained nothing, and very nearly did for all the Europeans in the place.

The danger was only momentary however: the Vali has done splendidly! The town is under martial law and as quiet as a lamb: nor is the slightest further danger to be apprehended.

Will send you photos. They blew holes in the Ottoman Bank and Bank of Salonica, either by mistake or for a joke: fortunately no one inside at the time. . . . I must end because more tourists have come in to know if they're safe. The sardines were *exquisite*. Yes, the music was quite right."

Three weeks later he wrote:—

"The men who attacked my carriage are going to be tried by court-martial to-morrow."

A good while after, that is as time must be reckoned in so deplorably short a life as Flecker's, viz., when the Great War had broken out, and he was lying at death's door in Switzerland, he wrote a short sketch, called *Forgotten Warfare*.[1] The three events described were this bombardment of "a Turkish gunboat (lately repaired in Genoa)," a very funny account of a brush in the Lebanon between Italians and Druses, and lastly, the battle of Lemnos, in January, 1912.

The Lebanon trouble arose out of an attack, by undiscovered persons, on a respected old Druse, on his way to Brumana. Flecker, who with the British Consul-General visited him, thus described him:—

"He lay there very cheerful on pink and green cushions suggestive of the Mahommedan Paradise. Then, while the Consul worked hard at conciliation, I talked amiably with the lesser notables."

Whether in letters or sketches, however lightly Flecker wrote, whatever badinage or sarcasm he scattered by the way, there is nevertheless in all his dealings with such "botched-up Government" as he called it, an undercurrent of real understanding, and to a certain extent of whimsical sympathy. However he gibed or criticised, however fervently he declared that he loathed the East, those emotions did not exhaust his attitude to it:—

"To think that it was with cheerful anecdotes like these that I had hoped a white-haired elder to impress my grandchildren! Now, there's not a peasant from Picardy to Tobolsk but will cap me with tales of real and frightful tragedy. . . .

But for my little memories I can keep at least this distinction—

[1] *Collected Prose*, p. 69.

the unearthly beauty of the East. I mean the adjective. A man may find Naples or Palermo merely pretty: but the deeper violet, the splendour and desolation of the Levant waters, is something that drives into the soul."

From time to time a visitor of interest broke what Flecker occasionally felt to be the monotony of life. Thus, in 1912, he observed that the Bishop of London was coming to stay with some friends of the Fleckers', that they were to meet him at dinner; the Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and the Bishop of Beirut being also invited.

At another time, when he and his wife were in their cottage in the Lebanon, Colonel Lawrence, of Arabic fame, stayed with them: it was a visit which Flecker enjoyed immensely, with all its openings for Oxford reminiscences and literary discussions. Never once in all this assortment of occupations and odd jobs did he relax his struggle to make his literary way. Again and again, in his home letters, he recorded little scraps of encouragement which came to him. The publication of *The Dying Patriot*, in September, 1911, has been mentioned. *Forty-two Poems* and *The Scholar's Italian Book* belong also to that year. To him, 1912 must have been rather disappointing on the whole; but he was steadily working at *The Golden Journey*. In February, 1912, in a letter home he said:—

"I have had a letter from the *Century Magazine* (America) asking for contributions, and a very good review in the *Athenæum* and a poem in the *Nation*, Jan. 20th; and one in *Country Life*, Jan. 6th, and a demand for particulars of my 'Life.'"

Almost immediately after this he wrote that he was asked to review "a fine illustrated book, called *An Artist in Corfu*, which brings back many wonderful memories." Then, at last, in October of the same year he could write:—

"My novel[1] is finished, but the publisher says he can't get it out till spring. Am busy finishing an Eastern play,[2] which I hope to place when I come to England."

[1] *The King of Alsander.*
[2] *Hassan*, originally planned at Corfu.

So far as such serious recognition as would enable him to devote himself to literature went, he must have felt that he was little further on in the autumn of 1912 than when he left England. Besides this disappointing reflection another trouble came, in the form of a good deal of illness, if not very grave, yet tiresomely recurrent. His health fluctuated a good deal, and once, in June, 1912, after he had taken his examination in Turkish language and law, he had a sharp attack of illness with fever, possibly induced by his recklessness in eating raw and not always ripe fruit, which he bought on railway journeys. His wife, too, had frequent attacks of one or other of the fevers which lurk in the Levant, which always made him very anxious. Apart from the personal and intellectual disappointment of receiving such scant recognition, there was the further practical disadvantage of not earning nearly so much by writing as he had once hoped. In reply to his mother he, on one occasion, admitted his financial insecurity :—

"You asked me about our income. Alas! with all possible economies we find life very difficult. I've not got a cent from my writings for ages and ages. But I would rather be poor with Hellé than rich with anyone else, so what matter?"

Yet, as a rule, with his Consular work, the social life, their own home life, the music and singing which were a constant recreation, and the beauty and interest of the country, he was happy. As the year wore on the disadvantages, specially as regards climate and health, became more and more insistent; and by September he had certainly begun to contemplate the possibility of giving up the service, if only he could find adequate employment in England. All the same, he had come to no kind of definite conclusion, for on October 26th, 1912, he wrote a short letter to his mother in which he said :—

"Of course, we shall come to Cheltenham as soon as possible. . . . It is said that Malta fever disappears as soon as one leaves the basin of the Mediterranean.

As for my leaving the service, don't be afraid. I shall not do so unless I find a really good job in England."

As always, he was longing to be at home again :—

"See you all again after two years at beginning of December,"

he wrote jubilantly.

They left Beirut eventually on November 10th to pick up the P. and O. boat for Marseilles. They went first to Paris, and then, very early in December, Flecker left his wife there with her mother, and went on to London to see publishers and a few friends. He finally arrived in Cheltenham quite tired out, but, after a few days' rest, he revived. His wife crossed from France and joined him, thus, at last, meeting his family. Their stay was very short, and he did not at once discuss his wish to come home permanently to England. Before they returned to Paris, unable to conceal his longing to turn his back on the East, he began to talk of possibilities of finding work in England. "A little home in England" was the refrain of his speculations.

There can be no doubt that a life relieved of struggle and straining anxiety, with plenty of fresh and good air, were what he absolutely needed. His instincts about his own vital needs, as distinct from his transient and often sudden fancies, were here, as often, markedly clear and trustworthy.

All kinds of suggestions, mostly of a pedagogic sort, were canvassed. Among other projects it was thought that a lectureship in a Provincial University or University College might be found. In the first place, the emoluments of such posts, in 1912, were still exiguous in the extreme, and moreover, Flecker who, after Oxford, had found it so hard really to accommodate himself to the other great English university, would not easily have tolerated the complacent provincialism from which our Civic Seats of Learning have hardly yet succeeded in extricating themselves.

The not less forlorn hope of a Teachers' Training College was pursued. Unless he had found a *rara avis*, a unique institution, it is certain he could have found no vocation

in this department of the learned world. True, he was ever eager to serve youth, and perhaps nowhere is youth more worth serving, more debonairly responsive than in an elementary Training College. But the peculiar atmosphere of these places would have repelled him. He, so restless, so adventurous, could never have borne that cramping timidity, that limited self-centredness. Not for him were endless discussions on salaries and Burnham scales, varied with the niceties of Freud and Montessori and their dreary peers in 1912.

Work with the Workers' Educational Association was proposed. This might have proved less unendurable if he could have avoided those centres which rejoice in wrested economics and tepid philanthropy. London or the North might have yielded him audiences genuinely interested in his one supreme interest—literature. But lecturing in hot and crowded rooms, and then passing into cold streets, a process inseparable from this kind of work, would have worked havoc with his health. University extension lecturing was yet another of these many projects. It, of course, was liable to the same dangers as W.E.A. lecturing, though, perhaps, to a less extent. Anyhow, the scheme did not mature. Probably any kind of teaching would, in the long run, have proved as trying to his health as to his temper.

It will be remembered that while he was still at Oxford two friends who knew him well suggested journalism. He would have found the drudgery of that profession at least as hampering to his chosen work as the Consular Service; and he must, probably, have gone through the drudgery, for no young, untried man is given a secure editorial chair, nor is he commonly entrusted with "leaders." Perhaps an engagement to supply some weekly periodical with a literary article might have furnished him with a small nucleus of income, while benefiting some journal, and adding to the gaiety of nations; for Flecker had a prolific and amazingly adaptable, even sometimes a risky wit, which might have

preserved his contributions from dwindling into the ordinary, rather sad weekly affair which flourishes on this side of the Channel.

No doubt, at this time, he seemed difficult and impatient, as on other occasions, he had been over the consolidation of his health. He was lavish in some directions beyond his means: and it is obvious that apart from his intense longing for pure literary success, he also wished to make money, because his financial dependence irked him, in itself, on moral grounds, and by the limitations it imposed.

Perhaps those devoid of the creative impulse do not easily realise the drudgery and tiresomeness of using the liveliest moments of power and the freshest hours of the day on routine work for the provision of the so unfortunately essential daily bread and butter; and of thus having only the rags and shreds of energy and leisure left for the prime business of artistic achievement. Nor should it be forgotten that Flecker, in spite of his acute sensitiveness to every kind of pain and difficulty, was at the same time irrevocably sanguine. His premature return to work after grave illness, his inclination to throw up an assured if disliked livelihood were probably compounded of a lively if groundless hope for the best, and a strenuous belief that he could, by hook or crook, free himself to do his real and chosen work. He was wholly devoid of any tendency towards the average Englishman's exasperating habit of admiring genius when its owner is dead. Flecker could not have been, he most evidently was not, unaware of his possession of capacities far above the average. No great men are. The cry of Erasmus to James Batt, echoing through the centuries, is typical:—

"Only look around and see what asses, with really no letters at all, are rolling in wealth, and does it seem much that Erasmus should not starve?"

As a matter of fact Erasmus never starved, nor did Flecker. But both—their precise relative worth need not be estimated here—were men of genius who could

have done the world greater service than they actually rendered had they only been by some good fortune relieved from pecuniary anxieties.

A small income, with no conditions whatever attached, was Flecker's real need.

About this time his parents proposed to provide him with a small home and income—Brighton was suggested. It was thought that with such basal security he might be able to earn what he needed beyond it. Various circumstances made the acceptance of this offer just then not feasible. Whatever the difficulties, he needed relief from pecuniary strain if his health was to be sufficiently safeguarded for the full ripening of his literary and dramatic powers, if indeed any material conditions could have guaranteed him against oncoming illness. In May, 1913, when he was back at Brumana, he wrote: "I don't think I need be dependent, if only you can help me through this illness."

It may, no doubt, be argued that other men have won through on even smaller good fortune than fell to Flecker's share. His well-beloved Samain, in fact, in certain respects did. Forced through his father's death into entirely unforeseen poverty, Samain left school and became what the French so picturesquely call *un saute-ruisseau* (and we, just an errand-boy), in a stock-broker's office. Thence he moved on to a clerkship in a sugar-broker's business; till, at last, he was slipped, by good chance, into one of those minor, not extremely exacting official jobs which seem fairly abundant in Paris.

With his complication of difficulties Flecker was unusually considerate for other people. No one can read his letters and fail to be struck, for example, by his reluctance—however urgent his wants and wishes—to give his mother and sisters trouble. Since the deadly severity of his illness was not realised for so long, practically by some not till the end came, it is clear that he must have suffered great physical misery, while he actually said very little about it. The gay *insouciance* and courage,

which enabled him as a child to chuckle over a funny book while awaiting the arrival of an operating surgeon, carried him later through pain and wretchedness, and brought him to the end, beaten physically perhaps by illness, but in spirit and temper gallantly unsubdued.

It would be futile, and even wrong, to publish the passages in his private letters, in which from time to time his weariness, temporarily intolerable, escaped. It is enough to say that the dreary strain of trying, or of desiring when he could no longer actively try, to escape financial dependence—because he could never really reconcile himself to being a burden on parents, however generous—added a very stringent element to his already heavy burden of ill-health, aggravated by his disappointment with a public which seemed incapable of realising that a true poet was striving to win a hearing.

It is easy enough for a back-glancing onlooker to perceive that an assured income, on which he could pursue his literary work, might—it is hazardous to say would—have made all the difference; once again it should be remembered how easy it is to be wise after the event.

No one wishes to cry over spilt milk; but some of us would be glad if any justifiable hope could exist that the future would learn lessons from the past; and that Utopia, when it arrives, would make reasonable provision for the poet, the artist, and perhaps, with incredible sagacity, for a stray visionary and dreamer now and again.

The pedestrian fact remains that in spite of all his efforts he could find no employment in England. He crossed over to Paris to rejoin his wife. She had not recovered at all satisfactorily from many attacks of fever; and it was finally settled that she should stay on for awhile in Paris to recover completely, and that he, remaining on perforce in the Consular Service, should return by himself to Beirut. This inevitable conclusion was just

"the heroic for earth too hard."

He went, but he could not wholly conceal his suffering.

In the closing days of December, 1912, he wrote to his father :—

" I am so disheartened. It is my tragedy. I have got to go back to Beirut alone, possibly to die. No one will do anything for me. I leave for Beyrouth[1] on the 3rd, from Marseilles by Messageries. It stops four days in Egypt. I may try to see if there's anything going in Egypt. Fixed home, good pay, three months' leave a year.

My books, etc., are coming to Cheltenham addressed to you. Mother promised she would store them. Please see they are dry.

If you had the slightest idea of the difficulties of living in the East, as we have tried, with no fixed home, and with a most serious illness ! . . . Till I have a good situation in England I cannot do well financially, and shall never have a moment's happiness or peace of mind."

To some, perhaps over-sensitive, readers the sere misery of these laconic lines is like a foretaste of the dry, dead, recurrent *motif* in Dr. Delius' March for the Procession of Protracted Death in *Hassan*.

Flecker wrote again from the boat, when he had reached the Gulf of Smyrna, to his father, entreating him not to forget him and his desire, but to do all he could to find him a berth at home. He gave little clue to its nature, beyond the negative help of saying he was " horrified at the prospect of endless years at Beyrouth," and " Nottingham is a deadly prospect too." [2]

As January wore away, he wrote for Turkish books which he had inadvertently packed and sent to Cheltenham, adding, with his usual reluctance about giving trouble, " Sorry to be such a beastly nuisance." In this same letter he, like some wearied child, recorded the Battle of Lemnos :—

" Saw a naval battle to-day—smoke only—in the distance. Cannons boomed. Tired of naval battles."

Early in February, in reply to his father's inquiry as to his views on a " business " appointment, if such could be secured, Flecker wrote :—

" Despite my doubts as to its being the right thing, I *by no means*

[1] Flecker spelt the word both ways, indifferently.
[2] A possible lectureship at Nottingham University College.

reject, as mother seems to think, the business idea. Have you really heard of nothing this whole month?

It is so urgent that I should get something before June. I am afraid all my chances are ruined by having left England. I can't get anyone to write to me about my play, or my books; or ——[1] or any soul at all.

One might just as well be buried in Syria. I am afraid I made a grave mistake in returning."

Towards the end of February, when loneliness was telling on him severely, he wrote still more urgently. A single sentence suffices to show how ill he already was:—

"Under no condition whatever, for no consideration on earth, will I remain in this Service for another year. The place drives me mad."

One thin possible string remained; he said he had written to the Oxford authorities asking if they would allow him until June to decide whether he would come home and embark on extension lecturing.

Then, on March 14th, he wrote to his mother, saying he had broken down with fever and a cold on his chest, and was in hospital at Beirut. His wife was coming out to him, but he was so distressed that he said he hardly knew how to live through the nine days necessarily intervening. That he was gravely ill was only too plain:—

"This beastly climate with its awful siroccos and days of heat and dust, alternating with blinding rain and hail, has done me no good.

All hope of anything, of seeing England again, ever having a home or a happy day again, I have utterly abandoned."

Yet Flecker, like the genuine Poet he was, could turn pain into beauty. When, in the summer of 1913, *The Golden Journey* was published, the poem, *In Hospital*, appeared. It was the record of those days of isolation and illness in Beirut:—

Served by an old woman, calm and clean,
Her misted face familiar, yet unknown,
Who comes in silence, and departs unseen.

At any rate, her care and the few days' rest did

[1] A well-known scholastic agent.

something for him, for only five days later he left hospital, wrote home cheerfully that he was about to write—

"a careful and confidential letter to Professor Turner at Oxford, who was trying to get me the somewhat similar job of Lecturer at the Working Men's Evening Classes."

Then, too, with a spasm of revived hope, he was bombarding the newspapers :—

"They refuse nearly everything. . . . Fortunately, I did a good deal of work in hospital. If only I were stronger! But I hope to be much better in a month. I wrote to the *Manchester Guardian* asking them if they would like a certain sort of article, and I hope to have a reply. . . . I have a new volume of poems coming out,[1] and the novel[2] too."

He added, as a plea for condonation of his occasional vehemence :—

"One gets a sort of mania of persecution, what is called *παράνοια* —a form of excessive self-pity, which is quite physical and passes when one is well."

He wrote home again on April 5th, saying that his wife had been delayed by quarantine, but

"I went on board and did it with her."

He had, however, to admit in this same letter :—

"I am not yet well, and haven't been to the Consulate for a month. The Foreign Office will certainly turn me out if this goes on.

I hope, however, to get to the Consulate next week. Of course, I can't possibly get posts like the Egyptian Secretaryship, I am too far away. But, at any rate, the only thing that interests me at present is to be well."

One great difficulty through these spring months was that he ought to have been working for four or five hours a day to pass another examination. Medical opinion of his case had been hesitating and contradictory, which had added an element of difficulty to his already obscure present and future. The doctors he consulted

[1] *The Golden Journey to Samarkand.* The Preface is dated, "Beyrouth, April, 1913."

[2] *The King of Alsander*, still hanging fire.

in Paris at Christmas had declared that they could discover no definite, indubitable mischief: but they had advised a visit to a laryngologist. Flecker, however, preferred and decided to wait till he could again consult the doctor in Beirut who already knew him.

Through the early part of April, acting on this doctor's advice, Flecker and his wife occupied a small furnished house overlooking the grounds of the American College, which was let to them by one of the professors.

He sat, as he was counselled, in the sun on the terrace, trying to work at Turkish for his examination. This so obviously tired him out that he stopped all Consular work at last. That he could still pursue his literary way is manifest in the famous Samarkand preface, so devoid of any trace of sick thought or suffering.

The indubitable fact that a man can still practise his predestined art when he can no longer drudge uncongenially sometimes puzzles the purblind, and they struggle to escape by condemnation of those " who are quite able to do what they like doing."

The mystery, however, would seem to lie a little too deep for a solution by any theory of undiluted selfishness. Within it may even be hidden a divine hint to humanity to relinquish cutting blocks with a razor ; a hint, applicable in all times, places and grades of occupation, that Wisdom should turn to the thorny job of helping every man to his own proper work.

The question of resignation Flecker shelved, thinking it wiser to leave a decision to the discretion of the Foreign Office. His parents' offer of a small house and income somewhere on the South Coast, became to him, at this crisis, a matter of practical politics, should his health finally force his retirement from the Public Service.

Towards the end of April, by medical orders, they moved to Brumana, on the Lebanon, being the only visitors in a cheerless barn of an hotel some 3,000 feet up. Milk and eggs were procurable, but meat only of very poor quality. Flecker's condition varied, with a

tendency, accompanied by increasing weakness, always in the wrong direction. In these unsatisfactory conditions, about May 25th the doctor ordered him to go immediately to Switzerland, advising Leysin, overlooking the Rhone Valley. There once more he was to undergo sanatorium treatment.

Consequently they started as soon as possible on the nine days' journey to Genoa. As the boat put in at Alexandria for a short stay, and Flecker's temperature was 104°, and he himself on the verge of delirium, they went ashore to an hotel.

When they could start again the weather to Messina was very bad. Storms required the closing of cabin portholes, so the journey was uncomfortable, stuffy, anxious. But the doctor had said an immediate removal to Leysin was vitally necessary: hence there was no alternative.

Out of the wreckage of his hopes, in grave illness, with no prospect of the longed-for independence, Flecker, sustained still by devoted love and care, had written while he was still on the Syrian hills some of his most heart-wringing lines:—

'Tis ever sweet to lie
On the dry carpet of the needles brown,
And though the fanciful green lizard stir,
And windy odours light as thistledown
Breathe from the lavdanon and lavender,
Half to forget the wandering and pain,
Half to remember days that have gone by,
And dream and dream that I am home again!

CHAPTER VIII

SWITZERLAND

In the early days of June, 1913, Flecker, after a comfortless journey, found himself at last established in a sanatorium at Leysin, never again to return to the East.

Almost at once there was a marked improvement in his health, and his indigenous and irrepressible optimism reasserted itself. He wrote telling his parents that, though absolute recovery must be slow, it had begun. He wished, of course, to see them, but as they were more or less detained in England by a daughter's illness, he assured them there was no real need for them to start for Switzerland.

That his interest in literature was as keen as ever is obvious from his incursion into the discussion as to whether Mr. Thomas Hardy should be made Poet Laureate. He wrote to *The Daily Chronicle* of June 11th protesting against the suggestion, remarking with his sly wit that "The greatest of our novelists is an odd person to propose as Poet Laureate."

Next he defended the Laureateship as an institution :—

"It is not a post which is meant to be given to the best living poet—or we should have to give it to Mr. Yeats without hesitation. It is a post for a good poet who is willing to be a Court Poet. But a Court Poet does not mean . . . a bad poet. . . . Poets are rarely iconoclasts—and the patronage of princes was never inimical to art. Think of the great court painters—Raphael, Velasquez, Rubens, a thousand others. Molière was a court dramatist. Virgil was a court poet."

Finally, he urged the appointment of Kipling :—

"I am an honest Liberal and I know Kipling is a Conservative, and has written sad doggerel against the Budget. But for all that what a fine thing it would be for the Government to drop the party question and advise the King to appoint to the post of Laureate the poet who seems to have been inevitably born for the position."

Canvassing the name of another poet who might have been chosen Flecker dismissed him, not quite fairly, as "respectable and nothing more"; adding "There may be some who think him a finer poet than the author of 'The Last Chantey.' On the word of a poet they are mistaken."

Nothing in these lively comments could suggest a man stricken with mortal illness. Just in that quality, they are typical of Flecker's unbroken spirit in the face of material and physical disaster. The deplorable fact remains that it seems clear that if the doctors who had attended him in the previous nine months had taken the most grave view and ordered sanatorium treatment then, there might still have been a chance of cure. As the disease developed, one of them, apparently forgetting his former optimism, said steps should have been taken six months before.

Half-way through June he was relieved when the Foreign Office gave him three months' renewal of sick-leave. However little good fortune during his lifetime attended his other efforts, it must always be a satisfaction to remember that his official service was sufficiently valued for the Government to give him every possible chance and consideration.

Flecker undoubtedly realised the seriousness of his case. The old wilfulness which had more than once driven him to refuse to give the time essential to consolidating his recovery, had entirely disappeared. He was willing now to pay the dreary price of recovery. Of course, he was no longer alone; he was surrounded with everything which love and devotion can give.

The place, however, to them seemed solitary, shut off. In one letter, Flecker called Leysin "a horrible town of disease." Its one redeeming feature was, he admitted, its wonderful air. When he could not bear it any longer, about August, he reminded his father that in that holiday month the trains were very quick:—

"The solitude around is awful. It would cheer me up a lot to see you."

His literary prospects at that moment could not console him much. It may cause some sober reflection by those innocent persons who imagine that an author—not a writer of popular novels, he is in another galley, but of literature—rolls in fat royalties, if they will meditate on one sentence in this particular letter :—

"I shall get £12 10*s*. when my novel is published in America, and about £5 from England, which ain't much."

It may further sober them to realise that better books than *The King of Alsander* have brought their maker less. The point is worth just this much emphasis, as it reduces Flecker's struggle after financial independence to literal, mathematical fact. It deserves further notice: such material failure was utterly powerless to damp, much less to destroy, his creative vigour.

He was working, as hard as his health would allow, at *Hassan* :—

"I have a most encouraging letter from the director of the new Birmingham Repertory Theatre, about my Eastern play, of which he has seen two acts only. But I want Granville Barker to produce it, and nobody else. I write at it about half an hour a day."

Evidently at this time his parents were under the impression that his sanatorium treatment at Leysin was rigid, and had said something about this to him, for he wrote :—

"Why give little digs at the dear old Cotswold San.? It cured me very quickly, and it was an infinitely better place than this, air and a certain hotelly comfort apart. What *do* you mean by 'letting me do as I liked at Etlinger's?' Here, I can do *anything* I like, walk seven miles, order quarts of champagne and all the poisonous liqueurs on earth, read till 2 in the morning, take no real rest hour. Here there is no discipline at all, while there it was extremely strict."

Flecker was trying to face all the facts. Inevitably he was somewhat depressed about his literary earnings :—

"I shall soon have nothing left in the world at all, alas!"

The exiguity of literary earning was the more serious

because he, at any rate, realised the improbability of any degree of recovery sufficient for official work :—

"Of course, more Consular service is impossible. Alas! more work of any kind will, I am afraid, be impossible, except writing."

At that one "possible" form of work, the one for which above all others he had been designed, he worked on, not only as far as but further than his health allowed. He worked, indeed, with the energy of some primal force which refuses to be gainsaid :—

"My novel will not be out till October, and I don't expect much from it. All my hopes, all my dreams are concentrated on my Eastern play. It will be produced, but Heaven knows after what worries—and then it may fail."

At this time he told his parents that he had got

"a little toy theatre, and my chief occupation when too tired to write is cutting out the scenes and figures of my play. It is a great help to composition.

Not a line by the way about my books. I do need some of my Oriental books for my play."

From this, his proper work in life, he flung a recoiling thought after the world's paid employments :—

"I pray I may never have to schoolmaster at all events."

After he reached Montana, Flecker wrote home saying that a friend, an old friend "S.," was trying to have *Hassan* translated into German, with a view to its stage-production in Germany. In one of his moods of vehement and passing impatience, he wrote later, in his own fiery fashion, of another friend who was trying to help :—

"I fear he knows or cares as much about poetry as a barn owl in a bag."

However, this time some success waited on the attempt, and in October Flecker wrote to his mother again about it :—

"I have sold my rights for the German translation of my play, *Hassan*, for £15, and £5 for subsequent editions. The publisher

becomes also my agent for the stage, and, in case of *Hassan* being taken—out of the stage royalties, the publisher has 2½%, the translator 25%, and I 50%. This is a very good contract indeed, as the publisher will, naturally, do his best to get the play accepted, and get good terms from the theatre. It is the famous firm of Langen."

In England Flecker at length persuaded an actor-manager from whom he hoped much to promise to read *Hassan:* he thus reported progress to his mother:—

"*Hassan* is being read by ——. I await with resignation the inevitable disappointment. It is a masterpiece, but I shall never live to see it come into its own."

Flecker's prevision, as usual, was remarkable. But he did not always so accurately read the immediate present. However, by December he had realised that a promise and its fulfilment are often anything but synchronous. He wrote wearily to his father:—

"*Hassan* never gets any forrader. . . . My good friend Marsh has done everything possible. —— keeps it till you write a rude letter, then writes to say he is just going to read it, please let him have another week or two;—it's perfectly horrible. I haven't heard further about ——.[1] . . . . It is time things were hurried on violently. The only way to get an Actor-manager to read a play is to stand over him with a revolver. Remember this is *such* an important thing. *Hassan* played would make me independent for life in all probability."

In the light of after events no one can justly tax Flecker with unpracticalness. He, and very nearly he alone, understood what his proper life-work was, and that, from the merest mundane point of view, it was well worth while.

Of course, faced by so many difficulties he occasionally wavered in the strength of his hopes, but never of his conviction about the worth of his work: thus, in December, he wrote:—

"I'm just a little cheered up because Viola Tree and Alfred Parsons are enthusiastic about *Hassan:* of course, it will come to nothing."

[1] The reference is to a well-known actress.

Once, too, writing for his father's birthday in December, 1913, he let his artistic disappointment express itself :—

" I'm feeling very wretched. I have got so much to say to the world, and no one will let me say it. It was the only thing I had left me, and it has failed."

To the crowd who have nothing to say, and no desire to say it, that cry may mean little; to the few, it is poignant indeed.

It seemed best to carry the story of *Hassan* straight on, though it reaches into the Montana days. But though all through he declined to accept even the defeat of non-recognition in his own lifetime, for from Leysin days onward he seems to have realised that he could not live to reap his fame, yet at Leysin he worked strenuously All through June he continued sowing the seed for the harvest he would never gather; he worked at *Hassan* with intensity of care, polishing, perfecting it. He found that he must have, for this and other work, many of the books he had sent from Beirut to Cheltenham. Literary people may care to know what they were. One list was dated July 4th, 1913 :—

Subh. i. Urnud (Persian).
Persian-English Dictionary (Palmer).
Little German-English Dictionary.
Gibb—History Ottoman Poetry, Vol. 3 only.
Calligraphiques et Miniaturettes persanes.
Anthologie des poètes français contemporains, Vol. 2 (paper bound).
Lirica antica Italiana (red buckram).
Virgil, Davidson—old green book.
Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius (little old green book).
Any amusing little books you like to fill in—*not* Molière.

The next he numbered List 1, and asked that the books should be sent by book post, wrapped in cardboard and sacking. He added :—

" Worry about nothing you can't find."

This request he made on July 24th :—

Most wanted.

Montaigne (old calf, 4 volumes).

Histories *only* of Shakespeare (from little green edition, 6*d.* each).
Shakespeare Sonnets (special edition, Inscription from J.).
Boccaccio, 4 lovely old bound volumes in Italian.
Goethe's *Faust*.
(1 Vol. light green linen and brown paper. I gave C. my glorious purple leather bound one, and am bitter to this day at her complete indifference.)
Heine, little leather German edition, translation in verse. Oxford series.
Hugo, Poems, 1 Vol. bound dark blue. (I don't know. I think it is *Les Rayons et les Ombres*.)
And the odd tiny paper volumes.
Byron's *Don Juan*. Red, Macmillan.
Ronsard (Gowans and Grey), 75 cents.
André Chenier. Brown linen. 1 Volume.
Petrocchi. —*Scholasticus*. Black.
Petrarch Sonnets. 2 Vols. Dark binding, very small.
Aubrey Beardsley. Green.
History of Advertisements in German (red and white, both outside study).
Cervantes. Stories in Spanish. Little blue book.
Lastly,
Tales of Crusades, given me by Aunt Rachel 20 years ago.

End of List 1.

List 2.

Books you may send if there's money enough[1] and you have time enough. I suggest sending them later by a week or two than the rest. Then, when one bit of joy has dimmed, more will come.

Agrippa, d'Aubigné. 2 Vols. bound in brown.
Yeats, *Wind among Reeds*, and Book with gold embossed rose-leaves. (asinine !)
Shropshire Lad.
Musset.
8 Artists. 6*d.*, Gowans and Grey, bound up.
Any other Gowans and Grey, 6*d.*
Tiny Juvenal.
} These you may have sent to me.

Pepita Jimenez
Donatiez.
} Red paper. Spanish.

Campoamor, *Dolores*. Small case.
Molière. 8 Vols. Tiny.

[1] This is a reference to previous arrangements he had made.

Marius the Epicurean.
Maupassant, *Pierre et Jean.*
Baudelaire, *Poèmes en Prose.*
Apuleius. 2 Vols., nasty green.
Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, red.
Burns, *Poems.* Black paper cover.
Sacchetti, *Poems.* Italian, blue.
D'Annunzio, *Poems.* Blue paper.
Lyrica Italiana. Italian, red.
Masacero, *Tales.* 2 Vols.
Marco Polo, *Travels.* (Newnes, 3*s.* 6*d.*, leather.)
Poe, *Tales.*
Whitman. Green and brown.
Tennyson.
Rubáiyát.
Aucassin et Nicolette.
Crosland, *English Ballads.*
My first efforts at Poetry, bound in vellum, typed: called *Poems by Kara Jones* (what an ass).
Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* and *Jenseits.*
(These books if I've got 'em. I think they're lost.)
Disraeli, *Endymion.*
Piers Plowman.
Herodotus. Greek.
Theocritus. Greek.
Theocritus. Lang's Translation.
I want these books just as much!
How I love 'em all.

End of List 2.

List 3.

Some day, at leisure, have Page to pack in a box the following big books of some of which I am in quite special need.

(1) The bits of my *little* bookcase with the red dragons (O joy if I could have it).

(2) These books all to be found in cupboard, in corridor, outside father's study.

Harmsworth Encyclopædia, 4 vols.
Chambers Encyclopædia of English Literature, 3 vols.
Turner. Large book given me by Father.
Series of illustrated 2 franc French books on artists, bound in white paper.

Then ask father if he would send that large Homer he promised me years ago, which I have never claimed because it was too big.

From Beirut Books,

Arabian Nights. 3 large volumes.
Don't read 'em, Joyce, but the pictures I want for costumes for my play.
Lucian. Beautiful old calf book. Large.
End of List 3.

These lists not only indicate the actual work Flecker was doing on *Hassan*, but they show him, the real person, as he was. No one, unless his prime interest were literature, would know so exactly the aspect of every book, and the precise place where he had left it. Then, the detail about the red-dragoned bookcase is only one of the many signs scattered through his letters of his nostalgic remembrance of home and his early surroundings. His life was really all of one piece; from beginning to end he was a literary man, and he had built his soul a house of books and other treasured possessions which might be the natural hearth of his creative genius. It is, after all, the man who loves the world at large, in a higher sense than chattering philanthropically about it, who also loves his homeland best.

Lastly, not to analyse the obvious to shreds, can anyone miss his love for beautiful books. Who, having found some of his most faithful, least disappointing friends, on his own book-shelves, can overlook Flecker's joy in "four lovely bound old" volumes of Boccaccio, or the symbolic golden rose-leaves of Yeats, or the "beautiful old calf" Lucian? Who does not shudder with him at the "nasty green" of Apuleius, so doubly annoying on account of Flecker's love for *The Golden Ass?*

It was during the weeks at Leysin that Flecker found the poetry of Paul Fort. Writing to Mr. Cooper in July, he said:—

"Let me make a suggestion for *part* of your tour in France. The present 'Prince of Poets,' *Paul Fort*, has poems in a sort of rhythmical, rhyming prose of extraordinary beauty, about the little towns of the 'Ile de France,' Nemours, Senlis, Vélizy, and it would be a most joyful thing to follow some of his footsteps. His poetry is gay, charming, almost Shakesperian in its spontaneity.

Doubtless, parts of it (not the parts I recommend you) would seem vastly shocking to our crabbed spirit, but it is as innocent as the bird on the bough. You have only to get Vol. ix. and Vol. x. called *Ile de France* and *Mortcerf* of the *Ballades Françaises* at 3 fr. 50 each. Eugène Figuière, 7 rue Corneille, Paris.

Mortcerf has an excellent introduction,[1] with extracts from all his works. I would send you the books, but I have been reading them in the edition of the General Library. Glorious holiday reading in any case. Paul Fort—and full of the real true France. Not at all Parnassian I'm afraid. I hope to write an article on him if the *Fortnightly* will encourage me."

Before leaving Beirut, Flecker had finished the Preface to *The Golden Journey to Samarkand;* and the book was published while he was still at Leysin. On July 10th he wrote about it to his mother :—

"I am so sorry you have not yet got from me a copy of my book, but I have not got one for myself.

My free copies will take months to come as the idiots have sent them by parcel post which takes about ten days. I will send one as soon as I get one."

On the 24th he wrote again :—

"I hope to have a *luxe edition* copy to send you in a day or two. I've my ordinary copies. Tell Joyce I thank her very much and hope she won't worry about the books. The *MS.* I want (no hurry and not sure it's there) is of a play called *Don Juan.*

Please send me a cutting from the *Echo.* It would amuse me. The Bible[2] is a very interesting one, but I wish it were the old text."

Flecker's progress in health at Leysin was practically nothing to the good. He was due for a medical examination in London in August, but his doctor declined to let him travel to England, especially as he could not possibly have been passed for Service if he had risked the journey. In July he improved a little. His book was published. He wrote to his mother, first about the play :—

"*Hassan* is finished, and gone to the typist, which is a great blessing, as it relieves my mind a lot."

[1] By M. Louis Mandin.
[2] His parents had sent them a copy of *The Modern Reader's Bible.*

Then he went on to speak of *The Golden Journey* :—

"Magnificent reviews of *Samarkand* in *Morning Post* and *Daily Telegraph*. Edmund Gosse (who after all is the biggest critic alive) followed up his letter to my friend Marsh by an absolutely ecstatic postcard."

He had, besides these reviews, received enthusiastic letters from friends and admirers in England : the pleasure of all that, doubtless, had a temporary good effect. Besides this, *The Spectator* had accepted *Taoping*. To add to his well-being, he was encouraged evidently to send for *Don Juan*, with a view to polishing it up for production.

In the latter part of July the weather at Leysin was abnormally bad ; pelting rain made walks out of the question. Mere sunlessness, without real bad weather, had always affected him. By August his condition was markedly less satisfactory. As he hated Leysin the doctor advised a move to Glion. As it proved unsuitable they stayed there a few days less than a fortnight, and then moved on to Montana-sur-Sierre, 5,000 feet in altitude, and still overlooking the Rhone Valley. The funicular would not work, which delayed them a day, but they reached Montana before the end of August, and were greatly relieved to find it further from the lake, and therefore presumably less damp than Leysin. Flecker's first impression of it, however, was not a cheerful one :—

" This seems to be quite the place to come to—for health—but the desolation—the black fir-trees again and horrid snowy mountains are appalling after Glion.

Shall not shift from here till I'm cured. Am feeling rather miserable."

As usual, he combated "misery" with work. Literature, as ever, was his resource. In the second week of September, writing to his mother, he said :—

" Ever so many thanks for sending tea. But *do* send us books. Only don't worry so much about all that Persian stuff. When I wrote for it, I was doing my play, and wanted to souse in the Oriental. Now I long for my Shelley, my Keats, Ben Jonson,

Marlowe—English poetry generally, in fact: and also very badly for my Virgil, and the little Pickering editions, and also the books I mentioned before. If the parcels are made up, send me the one with the Classics and English in. I don't think much of the —— Review, the man is so ignorant, his opinion is not worth anything. His talk about the Parnassians being succeeded by Baudelaire and Richepin has exactly the same sense to anyone who knows French literature, as it would be to say Tennyson is all very well, but we must remember he was succeeded by Fitzgerald and Mrs. Hemans. Only *The Times*, August 28th, *Morning Post*, and *Globe* Reviews have any interest as criticism: also the *Glasgow Herald*."

Had Flecker been so conceited as some critics have suggested, he would hardly have welcomed the measured praise in *The Times* (Literary Supplement) for August 28th, 1913. The book was in the list of those "received," on July 24th, with this remark:—

"Mr. Flecker, a poet of fine and careful technique, expounds in a short preface the theory of the Parnassian School of Poetry."

But in the review, five weeks later, the critic swept the theory on one side, addressing himself rather to the poetry:—

"Mr. Flecker's purpose is to achieve poetic beauty: and he achieves it, but not because that is his purpose. What gives his poetry its quality is not his admiration for the Parnassians, and especially for Heredia, but the intensity of his feeling, and the 'work' that he puts into his art. . . . He masters his emotions, shaping them into expression that shall be free of all excess or sloppiness, and therefore free of dullness and pretence. . . . Mr. Flecker . . . has nothing to 'tell' us. He avoids a 'message' as he would avoid cacophony; and the beauty of his sincere, clean art is best appreciated at first hand in his book."

With *The Golden Journey*, Mr. Edmund John's *The Flute of Sardonyx*, was reviewed. There is nothing to suggest that the reviewer thought that Flecker differed fundamentally from others in the Georgian nest of singing birds.

Only a year and a half later *The Times*' obituary notice of Flecker was subheaded, in capitals, "A Loss to English Poetry." The critic said:—

"He sought beauty everywhere, but preferred for the most part

of his life to find her decoratively clad. . . . He had great vitality, screened by his uncommon sensitiveness and scholarship qualified by a picaresque romanticism. His character was very clearly reflected in his writings, especially in his poetry. . . . His work gained in strength and clearness as he went on, and his craftsmanship became singularly accurate."

When, in 1916, Mr. J. C. Squire had gathered Flecker's poems into one volume, *The Times Literary Supplement* devoted five columns to them. At last recognition had come, when, according to his own sure prophetic instinct, he was no longer on earth to know it. One sentence will suffice to mark the climax of slowly growing appreciation :—

"Concision, pure outline, clarity, and a lovely detachment like that of some flower, curiously flawless and exotic, burning in the quiet solitude of a wood, are its imperishable virtues."

One other review gave him satisfaction. Months later he wrote to his father :—

"If you look in the December No. of *The Gentlewoman*,[1] you will find an extremely sensible and well-written article on *Samarkand*, by a lady critic who is quite unknown to me."

Somewhere about the same date he told Mr. Goldring of this article, "by a lady called Hodgson."[2] About this article he wrote me the following letter, which was published, in part, in *The Poetry Review* for September, 1917, and which I am authorised to print here, intact :—

"Hotel Stéphani,
Montana-sur-Sierre,
15th December, 1913. Switzerland.

Dear Madam,

I feel it would be quite discourteous of me not to write and thank you for the admirable article devoted by you to 'an English Parnassian,' in *The Englishwoman*. I am thanking you not so much for writing an appreciative article (which is always flattering

[1] Flecker mistook the journal. The article, *An English Parnassian*, appeared, not in *The Gentlewoman*, but in the (now defunct) *Englishwoman* of December, 1913.

[2] *James Elroy Flecker : an Appreciation*, p. 111.

Privée Hôtel Buol Davos Platz Switzerland

My dear Goldring

(1) Sorry I forgot to acknowledge the yellow book of tales. I always love to receive books. Can't honestly say I thought the stories good: but they were obviously a violent attempt to be like Ray. By the way someone sent me ---------- ---------- 's old book: it is a good book. Thank the Lord England has at last discovered Conrad.

There was a similar account of the presentation to Blunt in Poetry & Drama.

(2) Am very vexed about the King of Alsander. Will you be very vexed if I tell you I'm inclined to blame the publishers a little bit. Honestly, I don't think the

little ads with a 6 word quotation from the Times will persuade a couple to buy the book. What sells a book is an advertisement with about ten extracts underneath it. A book got a column review in the Spectator about a week before mine: the next week it was advertised in the Spectator itself with a large chunk of review & has multiplied its editions. Also one doesn't see Fox-Smith's lists with the other lists in the Spectator.

(3) Is there any news from America, and can you tell me if the book has yet been sent out for review there as I'd like to get hold of the American reviews.

(4) Although there was an advance notice in the Daily News of the King of Ads under the Daily News hasn't troubled to review it. The

Daily News review is a very important one, I suggest that they might be gently reminded - a fresh review copy sent 'em or something. Similarly I shall be cross if Punch doesn't review the book: could they be sent a copy? Hold the author particularly hopes for a review?

(5) I'm too rotten ill to write any new works now. In any case I'll wait till my plays out.

(6) Mustn't accuse me for ingratitude The Golden Journey was splendidly pushed. Naturally I'm puzzled - for the reviews were good selling reviews most of them.

(7) Send me along the half crown or whatever it is Alexander has earned.

Best luck I don't be fierce with me, but explain the unerring reason why novels don't sell

Ever yours
James Elroy Flecker

to the vanity of poets, the vainest of mankind), but specially for writing such an extremely intelligent one.

You know that Preface of mine, though it's absolutely sincere, is a wicked piece of work! It was no good just writing poetry and flinging it at the public's head—especially if your poetry isn't all of one piece, but rather apt to vary with moods. If one wrote *only* Oriental poems, for instance, the critics would say, This follower of Fitzgerald, etc., etc. So I had to give myself a label. I had to proclaim a *message*. Of course, it succeeded. I have irritated some and pleased others—but now I'm labelled!

The Preface, as I say, is quite sincere, and I'm glad you took it as such. But, of course, one can't compress into a few pages all one has to say on so vast a subject. For instance, one might imagine that by cursing the men with a message, I was cursing some people that don't exist. But the message nowadays is usually an 'immoral one,' a revolutionary one. It is the art of Ibsen, of Shaw, of Galsworthy, the whole of modern drama at its best; it is Swinburne, Shelley, Browning at their worst who have been ruined. It is not so simple to say what I mean. The message gives the enthusiasm: the enthusiasm is a glorious thing: Shelley is a greater poet than Leconte de Lisle or Heredia because of his enthusiasm for a lot of very dull doctrines of Godwin's. No Parnassian ever rose to the height of *Hellas*. No Parnassian ever fell as low as *Peter Bell*. Shelley's enthusiasms made a flame of his poetry: Swinburne's obsessed him till they burnt up his genius by killing his sense of proportion. He forgot to interest himself in words, or new impressions: as long as there was liberty, and the sea, and the big metre, and a few of his old stock epithets, he thought he could go on renewing for ever the inspiration of *Dolores*. But the sin I hate in Masefield, whose genius I once admired, is a quite different and more subtle variety of the message. He has no message whatever, but it struck him the public wanted one. He didn't directly preach. But he infected his long poems with a sham manliness, a sham religiosity, a sham roughness. He seems to stand away from his poem and shout at one like a travelling showman. Please observe. See how modern my hero is. How bravely he swears. How manly he is. How religiously he dies. Observe, I go down into the slums for my hero: how new and noble that is of me. Masefield's remedy.

But, of course, the point of all this is that the narrowing of poetry comes from the preachers. It is Shakespeare who was the great Parnassian, for he was interested in man, not in any narrowing theories of man. It is Paul Fort who can show us what it is to be a Poet, it simply means an enthusiasm for the world in every detail.

But I am preaching myself. It is time I became humble. You have pointed out to me in your article sundry errors of my ways.[1] You are perfectly write (sic)—'blushing' is a gross mistake. Mantling I suppose is the word one wants. As for the jams meticulously jarred, surely it must not be taken too seriously. In all my exotic poems I feel that there should be a most vigilant humour in the pomp and parade of choicely chosen words. *Taoping* is almost a humorous poem. Perhaps this humour is a characteristic of my own. But I think that a quality very like it makes Hérédia[2] superior to Leconte de Lisle. If I wanted my poems illustrated I should apply to Léon Bakst.

It may interest you to know that I have a rather lunatic novel just coming out; and that all my hopes are centred in an Oriental play which is now doing a long and weary tour of the managers.

That *Sacred Incident* by the way is piffle, like most of my other sacred poems. They degrade religion into a decorative motive, and are very popular![3]

I am so sorry you admire William Watson.

I haven't dealt directly with the points you raise: but I think

[1] The passage referred to is as follows:—" This volume of verse might well have undergone further chiselling, and would have gained much from a sterner process of selection. For instance the aptness of the lines:

For pines are gossip pines the wide world through,
And full of runic tales to sigh or sing,

is followed jarringly by so aggressively false an image as

'Tis ever sweet through pines to see the sky
Blushing a deeper gold or darker blue.

Again his laboriously phrased oddity,

And such sweet jams meticulously jarred
As God's own prophet eats in Paradise,

falls strangely from the pen which wrote, in the same poem, that wistful stanza of a merchant,

We travel not for trafficking alone. . . .

One hardly likes to suggest that an author so capable of work like the best in this volume is not aware of the difference in quality; yet, if he be, why admit the inferior lines in a collection designed to initiate a Parnassian movement?

The dreadful *banalité* too of the Angel's farewell to our Lady, and her reply, could surely never have passed the censorship of any member of 'Le Parnasse'—Heredia, for example."

[2] Flecker spelt Heredia's name indifferently, sometimes the French way accented, sometimes in his ancestral Spanish custom, without accents.

[3] This was Flecker's deliberate view. In his Essay on Paul Fort, he wrote:—

> " To the truly and deeply religious mind, far more dangerous than this quaint irreverence " (in Fort's *Coxcomb*), " is the utilising of the æsthetic beauty of Christianity to decorate poems that are not quite sincere, a moral fault from which our author is not entirely free, and in which our own pre-Raphaelites revelled."

From this condemnation Flecker, in a footnote, explicitly excepted Paul Fort's " thrilling lines " in *Le Plus doux Chant*.

this letter has dealt with a good many of them incidentally. I hope I have not been too sententious or boring. In any case please receive my very sincere thanks for your very excellent article.

Yours sincerely,
JAMES ELROY FLECKER."

Besides these few reviews he does not seem to have reaped much pleasure from the Critics. Yet he could write to his mother that the book was fairly successful :—

"My publishers tell me my book is doing very well indeed for poetry. That is to say that they expect to sell out the thousand."

This expectation would appear to have been realised, since a copy of that first edition, which those who were alive to current poetry bought for half-a-crown, was recently offered in a bookseller's catalogue for £3 17*s.* 6*d.*; a larger sum than Flecker, cramped in his resources, rather sorrowfully paid for "corrections": paid, however, because he would not ever sacrifice an improvement for any consideration whatever :—

"I am very busy with the proofs of my novel. I have had to make a great many alterations in the proofs which is a plague. But the alterations are unfortunately very important indeed.
I have to pay my publishers £3 for alterations made in my poems."

The King of Alsander appeared at last, in December, 1913, in America :—

"*Alsander's* just out in America at $1.60 in blue. That great work has only brought me in £18, so far,[1] so I hope for the best."

In a letter to his father, he remarked :—

"If my novel succeeds I stand to make £28 per 1,000 copies sold. Not much, is it?"

The Grecians had also appeared. Writing for his father's birthday, in December, 1913, Flecker made one of his few references to its reception :—

"Rouse took the trouble to write a long letter of appreciation of my little book on Education."

[1] It was published in England by Max Goschen in scarlet.

Beyond the pleasure of winning approbation from Dr. Rouse, whose criticism was particularly valuable, Flecker was specially gratified at any recognition of it, because it had been received with some regret in his home. He referred to this in his next letter to his father :—

"My disappointment when you refused to discuss *The Grecians*, and seemed to see in it nothing but a jeer—which was not a jeer at all, but a very pathetic allusion—to the service at the college, was very real."

As a matter of fact it was his mother who took exception to a passage in *The Grecians*. Flecker, at his own request and with his father's help, had been present at a religious gathering of headmasters and tutors, which had been held at Cheltenham.

He cared most genuinely for education: and in the spirit of a David, who is more aware than ordinary men of Jonathan's shortcomings, Flecker, with his usual pungent medley of wit and pathos, picked out some of the defects of our English system. This is the particular passage from *The Grecians* :—

"You know, perhaps, that there is a special service held for schoolmasters and members of the Teachers' Union once a year in the Chapel of some great public school. I once attended such a service. There, in a narrow space, were collected some two hundred head and assistant masters. A more tragic sight I have never seen. It may be that the sermon, preached by a young Anglican of great eminence, had affected me strangely: but I know that when I left the Chapel that I nearly wept. Thank God one does not often see a congregation of schoolmasters. Those withered trees are usually surrounded by the fair and delectable shrubs of youth: they look ill in a forest by themselves. Usually, we see the usher's unromantic figure graced by the boys who flock around him; and to them he is so familiar and trite a thing that they pay no heed to his sagging trousers and rusty coat, to his surly manners and unkempt hair, to his unchanging cravat and rectangular boots. But when I saw that unearthly congregation of men who had failed, whose lips were hard, and their faces drawn and sallow, when I remarked the imbecile athletes who taught football, and puny scientists who expounded the dark mystery of nature, the blighted and sapless scholars who taught Plato and Catullus by the page and hour, the little wry-bodied men in spectacles who trained their pupils in *King Lear* for the Cambridge Locals, I

shuddered and felt faint; for I remembered that I, too, was one of these: I, too, was rusty—I effete—I growing old."

The only charge that could lie effectively against the inclusion of this passage in *The Grecians* is one of questionable taste: Flecker had been a guest.

For the rest, it surely does not transgress the bounds of legitimate criticism? All who are accustomed to professional gatherings, professional Journals, must, unless they have become impervious to gaiety, admit that these things are not exhilarating. Necessary they may or may not be; but enlivening, stimulating? No! The Pedagogical Profession can scarcely claim to be an exception to this dismally general rule.

Flecker, too, was right on one other important point. His remarks were far less sarcastic than pathetic. His genuine concern for education prevented him always, everywhere, from undiluted sarcasm about it. It was far more a cry of disappointment than an unkind reproach. Flecker cared supremely for beauty, which this particular gathering singularly lacked. He minded the more because beauty is inextricably bound up with the highest forms of education, as he very well knew. This is evident to anyone who will read *The Grecians* through. Towards the end will be found Flecker's charming prophetic reminiscences of the never-to-be-forgotten, truly "humane" schoolmaster, delightful and holy Vittorino da Feltre, who, in the third decade of the fifteenth century, taught the fortunate children of Gian Francesco Gonzaga in that "Pleasant House" at Mantua:—

"We will refound La Giocosa, and build it anew in England, beside the sea that typifies our race. . . .

Ours shall be no ideal school for the ideal youth, but a place where hard work is done, and where boys are toilfully prepared for the difficulties of a modern world; yet, where too, we shall train many to understand and love the sweet pleasures of the senses. We even hope that a few of our scholars will be among the great. Now, my friends, our busy and toilsome journey is over: and it is evening.

Evening indeed had come and the cool hours of the day, but those two who listened to the unadorned words of this strange youth knew and understood the earnestness in his voice; and as they gazed at him while he lay there on the grass refolding his sheaf of papers, they thought of his gentle voice and eager words, and he seemed to them to be none other than one of his own Grecians strayed from some Elysian school where Socrates and Vittorino teach, and all the young lords of that shadow-world listen and admire. And whether their journey with him was ended, whether they would return to England to the old and weary toil, strengthened by this secret and beautiful ideal, or whether they would not rather join him and rebuild La Giocosa to the sound of music in an Atlantean isle, in that swift moment of wonder they could hardly tell."

As the golden cadences of Flecker's eager philosophy die on the ear, recalling inevitably the close of another great discussion which ended only when—

" the Light began to enter through the Chinks of the Shutters "

and

" they saw that already a fine rosy-colour'd Morn had dawned in the East, and that all the Stars were retired except Venus, the chearful Ruler of Heaven, which guards the Confines both of Night and Day; from whence seemed to blow a pleasant Breeze, which filling the Air with a piercing Freshness, began to awaken the sweet Comfort of tuneful Birds, in the murmuring Woods of the neighbouring Hills " [1]——

surely the rash young thinker may be forgiven his one indiscretion. Surely, in view of the fact that by his own spontaneous genius he set out, adventurously and unpiloted, on the new educational currents, indeed " filling the air with a piercing freshness "—that heavy, asphyxiated air surrounding conventional pedagogy stuck fast in well-worn ruts—he may be a little more than forgiven, even though he criticised his hosts, and in the course of his unrushing enthusiasm, royally swinged men, women and things, and among them even that august institution, which laid the infantile foundations of his own learning, the Cheltenham Ladies' College.

[1] *Il Cortegiano*, Baldassare Castiglione, translated (1727) by A. P. Castiglione.

Perhaps he might have digested this criticism of his cherished *Grecians* more peacefully if he had been in a more settled, happier mood, with a mind less occupied with religious speculations. By 1913, owing to various causes—for instance, he was older, and having, in the meanwhile, met many people of various faiths and none, he was more experienced—he had moved away from the vehemence of his Oxford days. These changes, and the fact that his wife was a member of the Greek Orthodox Church, rendered it almost inevitable, that having long ago shed Protestantism for what he called Agnosticism, he should, in a still further stage, turn to a more genial religious standpoint. Naturally, he would have preferred to agree with his parents. The consciousness that he did not, and his regret for the fact may, with human perversity, account for the rather grim birthday letter to his father, and for this sentence in particular :—

"You must excuse this cross letter—I am in considerable despair. I really am by no means an un-Christian person, but my ideas, which are not very 'Protestant,' would probably irritate you badly."

In a later attempt to repair this abruptness, after narrating various non-religious causes of his mental *malaise*, he wrote :—

"Why not write me a cheerful letter? . . . Why not ask me what sort of Christianity interests me? . . . I am quite grown up."[1]

In his deepest self, whatever passing vehemence betrayed him into saying, he was never an irreligious man. But neither was he, as his letters from boyhood onward show, ever satisfied with any religious attitude which did not seem to him genuine and ardent : and he was apt to express himself misleadingly to the excessively literal, as in the above phrase, one he often used, but extravagantly here, "considerable despair." His opinions and views, expressed at all times of his life, with excessive

[1] *Note by Flecker's Mother, June 20th*, 1924 : "His parents naturally rejoiced in his return to the Christian faith, although the colour of his views was not discussed in spite of this expression of his wishes."

emphasis, are themselves the sign and proof of his interest. While at Leysin he wrote to his father, in July, 1913,

"The Church of this place is vile beyond belief."

That may not be a faultless description, but it is a fervidly concerned one. Again, no irreligious or non-religious man could have had just his particular care for beauty in all its forms, and specially for the beauty of the natural world. He is not the first nor the last to whom the Noumenal, the "Real," has come through the Phenomenal, the appearances of a lovely world. It might not, in fact did not make him orthodox, but it saved him from the crudeness of a soulless materialism.

When he declared vehemently "I am not a good Christian" it was no defiant nor careless boast: it was, once again, not "a jeer" but "a pathetic allusion." He knew what was involved in good Christianity, or, at the least, made a very good guess at it.

He was, no doubt, one of those mortals who should somehow have a commentary to themselves about them. Without it, they are bound to mislead some of their fellow-creatures.

Then, it should not be forgotten, though it is useless to dwell excessively on it, that his daily life from hour to hour, from moment to moment, was one of pain, weakness, galling discomfort, and petty physical annoyances. It would not be true to say that he never gave expression to these. But the remarkable fact is his constant, fundamental courage, his consideration, his gratitude for devoted care; and not less his deliberate mockery of incidents inseparable from illness but specially trying to a hypersensitive and artistic temperament. Thus, in October, he wrote to his mother:—

"You talk of respirators: there ain't much novelty about 'em: I imagine Noah tried it for a cough he caught in the Ark. I even had one and flung it away. They're mostly very ugly and awkward. There's a very good one invented by an Italian sanatorium doctor: but I should be very glad if you would inquire about Sir Hiram Maxim's Pipe of Peace, which he invented for himself, and is said to be *far* the best of all inhalers.

But nothing would induce me to sniff hideous drugs with a deforming mask on my face eight hours a day except the certainty that it was a speedy and miraculous cure. The worthy doctor (according to the article you sent) says it takes the patient's mind off his illness. I should think it would never allow him to forget the hideousness and imminence of his disease."

Though he had a very accurate idea of his own condition, and in October wrote to his father, saying—

"I don't suppose there is any chance of a real cure, or of my ever being able to do anything but a little writing,"

yet, he patiently consumed medicines, and boxes and boxes of lozenges. The latter recur incessantly in his letters: and once, in December, he wrote to his mother:—

"Lozenges! I've just paid 10*s.* to get a cupboard never to see a medicine except when I take them. I *have* to buy and eat these foul lozenges. And if anyone dares to send me lozenges again as a *present*, I'll send a tooth-brush for their Christmas."

The bitterest part of his illness was to him the fact that it forced him to be a financial burden on his father. He was never allowed, during his illness in Switzerland, to go without anything he needed: but no generosity, of which he often wrote so gratefully, could avail to remove his sense of dependence, really through no fault of his own. He struggled hard to write, not only because it was his permanent joy, but because he had the sense to know that it was a legitimate source of sufficient income if only he could induce the world to listen and heed.

While he was at Montana, he conceived the notion which Mr. Goldring mentioned[1] of attempting "a translation of 'Virgil' as satisfactory as Fitzgerald's 'Omar.'" He had asked for his Virgil in his July lists of books. Again, when he was first at Montana, he wrote home that he was "longing badly" for his Virgil; and once more, in September, he wrote: "Badly want Horace, Virgil, Catullus, etc."

The better weather, on which he depended so much, and the Virgil project cheered him for awhile in the

[1] *James Elroy Flecker*, pp. 104 et seq.

summer months of 1913. During the autumn he made some progress, and on the 19th of November, he wrote to his mother that he should post the Æneid translation to his father when it was typed; but in December he asked for a school edition of Book vi., as he was still at work on it.

Some relief in the matter of his Consular work came to him, when the Foreign Office undertook to continue his half-pay until May 19th, 1914. He wrote of this arrangement:—

"Then I must come to London or resign. I do hope that by then *Hassan* will be being played. It is absolutely certain that I shall never be fit for Consular work again."

Even his work on Virgil was suddenly stopped by serious illness, and he suggested that one or other of his parents should come out to him during the Christmas holidays. Accordingly, in January, 1914, they both went to Montana. They were considerably distressed at the smallness of his room, littered, as it was, with medicines, apparatus for writing, and his usual collection of curios and odds and ends.

Moreover, he hated all the surroundings of the sanatorium. Though there was a panoramic view from his window of snow-clad mountains, he dismissed it all as "white-wash." He was longing for the

Meadows of England shining in the rain,

and his impatient feet would fain have trod the

Autumn leaves like blood and gold
That strew a Gloucester lane.

He was exceedingly glad to have his father constantly with him, and eagerly discussed *Hassan*, problems of education, and the to-be-epoch-making translation of Virgil, which was simmering in his over-busy brain: and his mother's piano accompaniment to his wife's violin, was his frequent recreation.

His parents still took a hopeful view of his case, and still looked for a tolerable if not a complete recovery.

Hoping to expedite and secure this, on their return home, they sent out an excellent nurse, whom he had known in his childhood. For a time his health improved again.

As the spring of 1914 drew on he varied, but on the whole towards slight improvement. *The King of Alsander* had been well received, and in March he wrote :—

"Gilbert Murray sent me an enthusiastic letter about my Virgil and urges me to continue."

That he had become more widely known was shown by the newspapers' requests for his photograph; he wrote home, in the early spring, to his mother on this subject. His fogginess of remembrance was considerable, but he finally decided that an amateur effort, which he referred to as "dreamy eyes," certainly existed. He asked for a dozen unmounted copies.

By April, he could no longer endure Montana's eternal "white-wash," so they removed to Locarno's "green grass and primroses." Though the place did not suit him physically, he was cheered by visits from his old friend Mr. Cheesman, and two other Oxford friends. In May Mr. Frank Savery got leave from the Legation at Munich, and went to Locarno to stay with them. It will be remembered that he wrote an account for Mr. J. C. Squire's Introduction to *Collected Poems*.[1] He has been good enough to send a few remembrances of his conversation with Flecker on the subject of religion. Flecker, though very ill, was in full possession of his intellectual powers, and was eager as usual to talk on vital matters. It was impossible that a man who had wandered widely and met many varieties of people should fail to grasp the world-wide significance of the Latin Church.

One day he quoted to Mr. Savery the remark of a well-known Cambridge don, to the effect that Rupert Brooke was the only man who had found exactly the right tone in which to speak of the deity, adding with a laugh :—

"What can be done with people who have never even heard of the great Catholic reaction of the twentieth century?"

[1] P. xiv.

His thoughts had been turned very naturally to the Greek Orthodox Church; not only because his wife was a member, and a cultured member of it, but also by his own most sincere Phil-Hellenism. The continuity of past ages preserved into the present, even in small details, delighted him, and contributed to his growing sense of the value of the Church's venerableness. An instance of this latter occurred in the conversation he had at Locarno with Mr. Savery, who has lately written[1]:—

"He liked to picture the Patriarch of Constantinople still wearing the imperial eagle of Byzantium embroidered on his vestments."

What, however, cannot be doubted is, that as his illness increased, Flecker craved more and more for the real, inward consolations of religion.

After Mr. Savery had returned to his work, Locarno, in spite of the greenness and flowers which he prized, was found to suit Flecker so ill, that at the end of May, one more move—the last—was made, this time to Davos. When they were settled there Flecker, writing to his mother, said:—

"My doctor is very nice and one of the biggest men in Davos—and that is to say in the world—on consumption. His degrees are English L.R.C.P., and what not. All I have against him is he is too cautious about doing the pneumo-thorax! He is a very clever man indeed.

You may wonder, perhaps, at my dislike of English doctors. I know Englishmen to be asses at everything requiring intelligence—their magazines are the stupidest, their newspapers the silliest, their cities the ugliest in civilised Europe.

I asked my doctor if he didn't think the English were rotten doctors. He said he thought they were inferior at medicine, but their surgery was splendid. . . . I have been in horrid despair lately: like a silly fool I begin to hope the second the temp. drops."

Nothing, not grave illness, literary delays, nor financial worry could permanently abate his energy. In June, he wrote a long letter to Mr. Cooper about the work at Dean Close in particular and in English schools in general. Though his most considered views on education are

[1] In a letter to me dated March 7th, 1924 (G. H.).

concentrated in *The Grecians*, this letter has intrinsic interest, and, considering Flecker's condition of physical weakness, is surprising in its intellectual, æsthetic, and temperamental vigour. It seems worth giving *in extenso* :—

"June, 1914. Davos.

My dear Cooper,

How *very* kind of you to send along the Bernard Shaw. You don't know what a pleasure it has been. I'm horribly badly off for books here. Nothing but a rotten English library, full of trash, in the place, and my good Geneva Library is too far off. I read the Preface on Education—it almost made me forget a filthy fever and the horrid weariness of life.

I get the *Spectator*, the *Daily News*, the *Mirror* and *Punch*, never anything else. I'm writing for the *Saturday Westminster*.

How I wish I could talk on Education, or rather how I wish I were a well man, and having overcome my father's terror of me, could educate the boys at Dean Close till they stood on their heads.

B. Shaw's mostly right, but he's too afraid of repression and forcing. Chesterton points out that one must know right from wrong and show it to the child. I would force lessons on the boys, but what lessons!

You know I benefited a lot at Dean Close from some lessons. Your own, of course, in Maths. But E. was very good in encouraging verse translations of French Poetry: he should have *enforced* them. EI.'s rude ideas of the beauties of English Verse most excellent for boys: but all that grammar grinding of his should go. H., of course, was a sort of lunatic: how he loathed me too; I got a great deal from him.

At Dean Close a boy might get a good glimpse of literature. But O Art, O Music, where? You have no conception how a boy's mind can be made to respond to this. Art must be treated historically (am sending my father an excellent book), but in music you must give the principles of harmony.

At Uppingham, we were forced to listen to Classical concerts—and ugh! we loathed it—might as well have sent us to lectures on Hegelianism. All this ridiculous attempt at bad musical performance ought to be substituted by guiding a good musical taste.

Then alas! those monthly holidays have been stopped. They were the most educative feature the school had, and should have occurred once a week. You know N. is the sort of man who would get up a subject say like Arabic Art, with you—or Gothic Sculpture—and give a lantern lecture on it with top-hole slides. (I'm sending my father a book by a lady—who quotes my poems—intended as a guide to Art—excellent—and there are slides ready.)

How I remember the lectures we went to on Astronomy; the lectures in the school, of R. (which gave me my first taste for Greek Art). The slides with pictures of the English School—the slides of Venice. Ah—if only this awful mistake were not made, to think these things a pleasant off-shoot instead of the real work of a school.

Keep exams., keep things of which real knowledge must be gained. But a truce to the grammar, to the school book. When I think that Dean Close could dare offer her boys for the study of the jolliest science there is, a book called *The World*, a shameless crambook of crude and stupid facts.

If only my father were not so busy, so superstitiously terrified of parents, so suspicious of art as something immoral!

Look here. This is the true way of teaching. The school is to learn all about Spain. That's the way to learn things.

It gets hold of all the best books on Spain, Fitzmaurice Kelly on the Literature—and all the boys are given the *Arsana Espagna* with about 2,000 illustrations of Spanish pictures—and the Gowans and Grey 6*d*. Murillo and Velasquez. N. gives a lecture on Spanish music with illustrations—also talks about *Carmen*.

Washington Irving's *Alhambra*, that jolly book you gave me, is read aloud to the kids, and also a suitably abridged *Don Quixote*.

Any boy who wants may learn a little Spanish.

The Classical boys read the Classical passages about Spain.

After six weeks of this, and a term on France, and a term on Italy, and a term on Germany, with a week or so for the other portions of the world, you'll have done some education.

Then the Nature Study. How I regret I was not *forced* to learn about plants and things. This dilettante Nature Study business must be supervised, insisted on, not made an excuse for boys going walks by themselves, and *not* left (whatever B. Shaw says) to the boys who like it only.

There, for a sick man I've written a lot. Do answer me. Write a long letter; and whenever you feel that B. Shaw and Wells are unkind, get up a lantern lecture, and overrule my father, and you will *know* that you are giving the boys something splendidly worth while.

Ask my father to show you the book *Ancient and Mediæval Art*, which gives the addresses of the slides. I'm sending it him to-day.

Ever yours,

Roy."

One would have thought that this letter, if only for the characteristic touch which puts Spain, France, Italy, and Germany into the place of honour with six weeks or a term apiece, and splendidly sweeps " the other portions of

THE ELMS OF "NOVEMBER EVES."

the world" into a beggarly week, would have provoked an equally spirited rejoinder. Yet, three months later, Flecker referred to it, in writing to his mother, regretting that Mr. Cooper had only said, in reply :—

"That he hadn't got his taste for music at school, and so he agreed with Bernard Shaw that boys shouldn't be taught anything at all."

Still, whether his pedagogic suggestions received attention or not, Flecker did not abandon his propaganda. After the war had broken out he sent these lively suggestions to his father :—

"*New Statesman*, Nov. 14th, has a quiet little poem about the view from Nursery Window.[1] Better, most suggestive stuff by Bernard Shaw—on the war—some piffle—some very just.

Might I humbly suggest that every boy in the first three classes, having been told that he needn't believe a word of it, should be made to read the article and write an essay on it?

I expect B. Shaw would be delighted to see the three or four best essays. He would certainly write a charming letter. O, my dear father, I am a born schoolmaster. I adore it. I wish I had entered D.C.S. on the lowest salary! . . .

Paste over the adult passages, and get 100 copies cheap from *N. Statesman*. . . . If you've got boys sweating for those filthy Locals, and real education is at a stop, it's a great chance for boys not in for Locals. There is time to have it *read out* though (with comments) to all. I should cut the Republican stuff and all about the Oath and the Church—all of which is rot anyhow. If you take my suggestion about making Shaw a basis of war-study, I shall feel it a high honour."

Flecker was, beyond our common fate, a conflict of opposites, a many-sided man. In the *Samarkand* Preface he denounced the poet with a message. Yet, in *The Grecians*, and in these letters, his inextinguishable longing to teach his fellows bursts out. At one moment he would claim to be a poet and nothing else, ruling all his life and tastes conveniently to that rôle. Then, again, he would, as here, declare he was a born schoolmaster, forgetful that quite recently he had expressed a fervent hope that

[1] *November Eves.*

by whatever means he might gain a livelihood it might never be by schoolmastering.

As his illness increased his activity became less physical, and more and more mental and spiritual. At this time politics seem to have taken a greater hold on him therefore. Towards the end of July, in a letter to his mother, he embarked on an eager defence of Greece :—

"Don't abuse Greece, the country which (all sentimental reasons apart) I love next to England. (Can one not love stupid people?) What on earth do you mean that countries are to be blamed for letting their kings be shot at? The King of Greece was enormously popular and killed by a lunatic: Greece is an infinitely happier country than England, and every peasant knows how to sing his old ballads, while in England we howl the filth of the halls. France is, of course, the real head of the civilised world with its strong common-sense (despite hideous government), magnificent art, literature, and now even music."

There is the gap of a month, the month of August, 1914, in which the Great War began, between the above letter and Flecker's next. He had been rather more ill, and also the outbreak of the war seemed to upset the posts.

Eleven years after, in days when so much which at the time seemed unforgettable has been forgotten or shovelled out of sight, his vivid letter of August 26th, full of mixed interests, hopes, and thoughts, may be found worth reading :—

"I think exactly what Shaw thinks about the war (he has forgotten about Alsace Lorraine though) so send you cutting from *Daily News*. We fear we can't get a flat till Oct. 1st—nothing going. Nuisance. . . . Money we can only get by wire from the bank. Provisions are pretty dear. It may be years before I eat fish again!

Poor Savery had a bad time in Germany closing the legation in Munich. He is working at the Consulate in Berne, and is coming here to pay me a visit soon, which will do me a lot of good.

The English doctor is an old Oxford man—very nice, good doctor.

The poor English papers have been reviewed with such silly severity. On comparison, I find I know much more about the war from the Italian paper I get here. I knew of the landing of British troops at Boulogne and Havre five days before you did. The

only thing is, if the military censor is such an ass at his duties, are the military leaders less asses at theirs?

The *Daily* —— war photos are wonderful, consisting of—

(1) Pictures of Servians from the last Balkan War (called, Servians fleeing from Austrians, etc.).

(2) Pictures of the *Dutch* army, mobilising.

(3) Pictures of the last review of the British Fleet at Spithead.

I wonder if they are still under the impression that the Queen of Albania weighs 17 stone (they got hold of the wrong Princess of Wied, you see).

. . . . . .

I'm afraid this has bust up all idea of *Hassan* being played, tho' I haven't heard.

I hope Oswald is in the Territorials. And I do hope that England will discover that what is wanted is not a hail of subscriptions (one cad gave £1,000 to the Prince of Wales' Fund and dismissed all his employés, as if that were the way to help England), but to *think* out a good plan by which charity shall be needless. Compared even with Switzerland, the state of England must be very happy as yet. Don't like to see advertisements of 'Buxton in the centre of England, the *safest* of our watering places.' To appeal to the cowardice of old women in that way is disgusting. . . .

Have had 8 months in bed now all but 7 days, and feel I have no reason to go on living, being a burden to Father and everyone else."

No words probably could represent Flecker's real feelings, about the world and himself at the war's outset, more accurately than this letter does. Fettered as he was, he chafed that he could render no service just when England needed all the good brains and wills she would find. Putting aside his own discomforts, not a little increased by war conditions, he fell back on that fundamental endurance which had always been his, even in childhood's days, when he was brought squarely face to face with the inevitable; an endurance which was quite compatible with surface irritability, with vehement and not always mutually consistent judgments, flung here and there, on men, things, and theories. He was more than ever shut away from chance visits from friends, and, for awhile, even Mr. Savery, on whose periodical

arrivals Flecker had counted, was unable to come to him from Berne.

However, he and his wife found a flat sooner than they had expected, and they moved into it early in September. This change, bringing with it more suitable food, at first caused some improvement in his health, so that he wrote with his customary revival of optimism :—

"I do hope a year will let me be well enough just to crawl down to Italy and write—which is all I can hope for. . . .

I hope also the war will be over—for all writing men are ruined. So horrible I lost the Polignac Prize for the best book of the year. Gosse, Yeats, Gilbert Murray all did their best for me.

Savery can't come, kept at Berne. This has been a great disappointment. But I am getting hardened to every form of trouble the Devil can invent for me."

The reference to the Devil is not just careless. Flecker, impressed by the troubles of the war, seemed to realise, in some degree, the value of prayer, specially in connection with the relations of the soldiers, their mothers and wives. He needed some consolation himself. To a temperament so ardent and responsive, to know of the bitter need and to be debarred from service was misery. He managed through it all to keep his steady good sense and clear-sighted balance :—

"The horrors of war is a subject of which I am tired. Nothing to the horrors of peace if the Germans win."

At the end of September he wrote a long letter to his mother : the following extracts throw considerable light on his general attitude to men and affairs, very near the end of his life : he had scarcely more than four months still to live :—

"You know I love and venerate France. Why do you therefore write irritating disparagements of the French generals who have done so magnificently ? No nation but the French (I admit we have given splendid help) could ever have stood up to the Germans like that—and the French, about whom I know a vast amount, have achieved this result through the great writers who have been preaching unanimity, Christianity, and discipline in France for the last ten years. I have never heard anyone accuse the generals of

mistakes. The Italian military experts consider the retreat on Paris as a marvellous feat.

Again, you must remember that men like Bernard Shaw and myself (I have not the Xtian virtue of intellectual modesty, I admit) are more likely to be right than Rosebery. Of course, it is very easy to agree with Rosebery, who very ably and sweetly says nothing whatever in several columns. But do you *know* anything about this Belgian business (*e.g.*, the date of the Treaty and who signed it). We have torn up bits of paper enough ourselves—Heaven knows—we let Austria enslave Bosnia, which we had guaranteed many years later than Belgium, without a word. Vile hypocrisy. We went to war because we had a moral obligation to France.

The Belgian business served as a useful ultimatum to Germany, who we knew twenty years ago had decided on that route—and a sop to a populace wanting something to drivel about.

Then Nietzsche. I am and always have been most anti-Nietzschen. About Christianity, do read a little Chesterton (*Orthodoxy*, for instance) and the life of S. Francis or something—to see what it can mean to other people—and to me. For me that's what it means. Really there are higher forms of it than your Welsh revivalist. I am not a good Christian, and hours of bed make me impatient. I am worried with a sore tooth."

About this time, writing, as he often did, to his father and mother together, he returned to the ethical problems arising out of the war :—

"Very glad to have Father's letter. I don't care sixpence about moral aspect of affairs. Germans wicked. And what about us in Egypt? Let's wipe their eye for the joy of it. But I don't think the old Kaiser has anything to do with this at all, it's all that unwhipped-enough cub of his. Kaiser is polite to artists: some monarchs I know of seem to revel in being as uneducated as a suburban grocer. . . .

Quite right about saddle. I shall never want another.[1] . . .

Don't let Oswald go to Cambridge, Clare, Selwyn, the Hall. He might as well join a baby club. Oxford is a much better place for him. There he can be intelligent without becoming a freak. Will write very seriously *re* worthlessness of almost all Cambridge Colleges if you like."

Flecker said little about it, but his enforced idleness distressed him. In October he wrote :—

"Should so much like to see Oswald. To have one's brother almost a man and not to know him at all—and so warlike too."

[1] His saddle had been sent in response to Lord Roberts' appeal.

A fortnight later, in a letter to his father, he recurred to this :—

"I am so glad Oswald is keen to fight, tho' it would be a horrid anxiety for us all. Of course, I feel very deeply what it would mean to you and mother to have him at the Front, but it is worth it. I wish I could give you better news of my health. . . . I suffer from a horrible depression, due the Dr. says to slow circulation. However, the news to-day is more cheering. It's snowing, ugh! . . . Tell Oswald I would to God we could go and fight together."

The attitude of some people did not, however, give Flecker as much satisfaction as his brother's :—

"To hear Miss —— exclaim without raising an eyelid how her brothers had to go and become Turkish subjects (think of it!) because their dear limbs were too delicate to go and serve Austria (who had never maltreated them at all) made me quite furious. . . .

I rather fear, I have no proof, that English literary men are too superior to fight. I wish I knew. I believe Cheesman has gone."[1]

By this time, the anniversary for which Flecker had always cared so much, his birthday, was at hand. In answer to inquiries from home, he sent sundry suggestions for acceptable presents—*e.g.*, "extra cheque," and then—

"(1) 6 or 9 months' subscription to *Land and Water* from the 26th September, inclusive. That number I have seen, and it has a splendid account of the war I want to keep and follow from that time.

(2) 6 or 9 months' *Illustrated London News*.

(3) 6 or 9 months' *Punch*.

Any relations wildly anxious to assist and left in the cold can add that amusing rag *The New Witness*. Order at once, and I'll have 'em on my birthday."

Flecker received a totally unexpected present for this his thirtieth and last birthday. He wrote lightheartedly to his father :—

"The F.O. have granted me a gratuity of £125. I am sure I

[1] Flecker's surmise was correct. Mr. Cheesman was killed in the War. Flecker wrote this letter on October 31st. Therefore Rupert Brooke had already been through the Antwerp Expedition. A few months after (February, 1915) he went, as is well known, with the British Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, and died, in the Ægean, some three months later than Flecker.

don't deserve it as a Consul, tho' what England owes me as a Poet is a different story. Tell me your wishes about it. . . .

See this week's *New Statesman* for a little article by me. Tell Mother she should be glad I had spirit enough to reply to her little jabs. Usually, I don't care what anybody does, thinks, says, or is: I'm too tired. . . . You seem to have sent me an extra cheque this month. If that's a birthday present, it's a most handsome one. I think I shall buy for part of it a little toy type-writer. Many thanks indeed. I'll also get ½ doz. vols. of yellow French books (poetry) bound which are falling to pieces."

He wrote three letters in rapid succession to his mother about his birthday and the presents. Evidently he was feeling very ill, but his old zest in family anniversaries remained :—

"I'm a bit late answering your birthday greeting. How touched I am by the constant way you write to me. It's you who really love me, dear Mother—and I'm afraid I wasn't cheerful at Montana —but you were so nervous. . . . I would like to have you here to see our little hole, which is wondrous jolly considering it's all made up of scraps of things that happened to come from Beirut."

When Flecker grasped that they were really isolated, for no one could tell how long, by war conditions, he did his best to reproduce the atmosphere of his old nursery at Dean Close, in his present surroundings. In a letter to his mother he asked for—

"any really good cards of the Cotswolds, Gloucester Cathedral, and even the horrid old town itself;" adding, "You don't know how jolly I have got my bedroom—like the nursery used to be got up—with pictures without frames, beautiful 1720 maps (I had picked up in Paris for a penny years ago), photos, pictures out of the old *Studio*, etc."

As an afterthought, he wrote :—

"I got a nice little medicine chest made, which much improves the tidiness of the room as the medicine bottles were threatening to submerge us."

The solitude of Davos, cut off as it was, and with some grave doubt, as he remarked in a letter, concerning the continued supply of provisions, became at times very trying. His thoughts turned to his mother, and he

assured her, as in the above letter, that he felt she only truly understood and cared. Some people, doubtless immersed in "war-work," he felt had wearied of him; "their letters," he wrote, "exude boredom from every pore." He was as much cut off from his friends as from his relations, with one exception :—

"Of all my friends, only Frank has stuck close, but it's impossible for the rest."

One day he said in a letter, that if he sounded ill, they must rest assured that he found "jolly cheerful days." On another, when the weather had changed, bringing on a harassing cough, he wrote of suffering "such useless grinding tortures." His condition, and therefore the expression of his feelings, changed very quickly; but on the least improvement, as when a change of position proved helpful, his mercurial spirits bounded up, so that once he suddenly wrote :—

"I'm going to settle down and eat hard. I've begun already and my nerves are steadied. But that don't mean that I cease to yearn for the affection of the family and above all to see you."

The periodicals he had asked for, as birthday gifts, were sent, and gave him much pleasure. Mr. Savery gave him "a fine book," and he was considerably gratified because his doctor came to tea with him, bringing him "a tiny wee carved elephant fit for your glass cupboard."[1] Though he was now gravely ill, he wrote towards the end of November to his sister Joyce, begging her to send him out great parcels of books :—

"I'm asking you to do something which will be the grandest Xmas present I can have. Each of my loved books will be as new to me, as if just bought."

He wrote, too, with all his old anxiety to give her the least possible trouble :—

"I understand my books are now in the shelves. . . . . *Don't* grub in boxes."

[1] Flecker had begun collecting elephants when he was at Cambridge. He had a taste for curios, and sent many to his mother for her cupboard in Dean Close drawing-room.

He was careful with directions as to packing and sealing, and then ended with characteristic irrelevance :—

"Temper vile. Nice old bearded China missionary called this morning—we had a charming talk on China. . . . He is our new chaplain."

This letter brought him some comments from his mother, and he wrote in reply one of his rare letters on religious matters :—

"It will please you to know that I intend to take Communion this Xmas. Please just mention your pleasure in your next letter. I have not been suddenly converted or anything like that. It is partly that B., though a very nice man, was rather feeble and has gone, and this extremely nice old saint from China has turned up : partly that I feel the attraction of the English Church Service and Bible, and the Englishness of it all too keenly to turn to foreign creeds however much attractive.

But I must admit and want you to know that the general wobbliness of the English Church is a great nuisance to me, and that I am bound to be, as a poet, a thorough ritualist and detest anything like Welsh Revivals. Sorry to muddle Joyce—please send my Teacher's Prayer Book—and some Greek Testament or other.

I wish people did not think it necessary to honour God by packing the Bible into one volume, with double columns and bad print, with ugly black leather—and all divided into stupid little verses. How grand it would be to have the New Testament at least, in a fine volume, printed like a real book, and *not* the Revised Version."

Flecker did what he could to repair man's blunders. He bought a Tauchnitz copy of the Authorised Version of the New Testament, and had it bound in singularly beautiful blue "half calf." Failing to get a facsimile for his mother, he sent her, for a birthday present, his own copy at Christmas.

The reason for his caring thus for the *format* of the Bible was not merely literary, but arose from his conviction of its overwhelming intrinsic value. In Elizabethan and Jacobean times, as all cultivated people know, our language culminated in a beauty, richness, dignity, and aptness of diction surpassed neither before nor since. Just at that great period the Authorised Version of the

Bible was made. Since that time, with the exception of the last two or three decades, the vast majority of our writers have been brought up upon and fed with its glorious pages.

It is now becoming the fashion, after years of partial and painful neglect, to laud it—as great literature. Its matter, however, cannot be so easily disengaged from its form: and, though some, no doubt, wandered, in later life, only too far, it has, as an indivisible whole of perfectly wedded matter and form, moulded the style and, to greater or less extent, informed the thought of writers as different in character, temperament, and circumstances as Bunyan and Henry Vaughan, Thomas Browne and John Donne, Milton and Marvell, Johnson, Burke and Blake, Gibbon and Robert Louis Stevenson, Byron and Newman, Keble and Swinburne, Browning and George Eliot. Flecker, like so many others, had been brought up on the Authorised Version; he deliberately, in this letter, wrote "*not* the Revised Version." No doubt to many of our great writers, in spite of their debt to it the Bible came, at last, to be little more than "great literature," which, after all, is not a negligible thing. With Flecker it was not so. In his own words, he was not "suddenly converted." He changed as life went on: not infrequently he wavered; but his house was not built upon the sand. And so, the Authorised Version of the Bible and the Greek Testament, together with the Book of Common Prayer, drawn so largely from ancient sources, and couched in the poignant and concise speech of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were increasingly prized by him in his Switzerland days, and were always within his reach. At last, he was glad that his wife should read the daily Evening Office aloud to him; and thus, in his pain and growing weariness, the words of the Gelasian Collect of the fifth century brought to him the priceless remembrance and assurance of "that peace which the world cannot give."

At this same, his last, Christmastide he sent his sister,

as a tiny mark of gratitude for all her trouble over his books, a brooch, observing :—

"Opals are unlucky unless you are born in March. Then they are lucky. In any case, there's no fear between brother and sister. This is true magic."

In one of his latest, if not his last, letter to his old friend, Mr. Cooper, he admitted that he was too ill to write more than a line. In answer evidently to some expression from Mr. Cooper of professional weariness, he exclaimed :—

"Remember, man, here lies one who would give his right hand to be able to do your work, and to have a Virgil or a French class before him—to schoolmaster on £100 a year and food. . . . Go to France for the Xmas holidays. . . .

Come to Davos. Can't promise to put you up . . . . but can promise you wonderful climate, health, and a few talks about good things. I may even tell you why I have become a High Churchman."

In spite of great fatigue—he said once that his usual allowance of letter-writing was one a day—Flecker worked on to the end, and was cheered by the acceptance of some of his work, for he wrote to his father, saying :—

"Read *The Sphere* to look out for several highly paid poems of mine about to appear."

Very early in December he rallied, and described himself in italics as "wonderfully better." Just then his brother-in-law sent him from Paris a new remedy, which for a time had an astonishing effect on his health, and, naturally, on his spirits :—

"God bless you, dear Father. Your disappointing son is getting rapidly better, and once he is well enough to write a reasonable amount, which, pray God, will be in the spring, will probably support myself six months every year from literature alone—if not more. Do you realise your son is thought by Gosse, Yeats, Gilbert Murray, and also, thank God, by some editors, to be far the greatest poet of his day, barring Yeats? Is it not worth a year's illness to be great? I think so. Do write joyfully.

Roy."

Money had reached him from *The Sphere*. *The New Statesman* had published *November Eves*, and an article had brought him £20. All this inspired him to assure his father that he would—

"start fair for independence on Jan. 1st, with various sums coming in for poems and prose.

This has unburdened me. I need now never worry about finances in letters to you again."

The nearest way to knowledge of his real life during these last months is through the poems he made, which were posthumously published in that paper book, whose format was wholly incommensurable with its contents—*The Old Ships*.

In this may be found *The Burial in England*—that it should have been the work of a dying man its virility makes almost incredible. There are, besides, *Stillness*, perhaps the high-water of his achievement: *The Pensive Prisoner*, with its self-revelation; the longing of *Hexameters*, the wistful dubiety—as he stood face to face with the Great Adventure,—of *The True Paradise*.

The translations, his finest examples of the art in which he excelled, belong to earlier years. His desire to keep *The Golden Journey* "original," excluded them in 1913.

He was very busy with Christmas presents, keenly interested, too, in a long list which he sent home concerning those he was to receive. Among these figured, "as good a toy printing-press as can be got." Then followed this request:—

"If anyone goes to London, step in the Japanese shop just past Tottenham Circus on the right and get anything jolly from a carving to a toy, from a book of drawings to a colour print."

The old real Flecker, who had persuaded an aunt to appreciate Japanese colour-printing, and who at Cambridge cherished "The Demon of All Sloth," was as far from death as ever.

As he considered, with his usual attention to individual

idiosyncrasies, the presents he wished to give, he was particularly concerned over his brother. He wrote to his mother :—

" Thank Oswald for photo. (He's too thin, mother, must be very careful not to mix work and athletics.) Too tired to write to him. *If father permits*, I want Oswald to have my purple bound *Salammbó*, which Joyce will find in my shelves—for Xmas. It is a great, famous and beautiful classical French novel about Carthage of old—written, of course, for men—but not a patch as shocking as the Latin and Greek fellows he reads for his Schol."

To a young cousin, who had joined the army, he sent a Trench lantern with a letter :—

" You hang it on your buttonhole to light you in your trench. It may be rot, but it comes with my very best wishes. . . . I wish I were off with you. Haven't seen you for eight or nine years. Tell your father and mother I don't forget them. I long for your father's cheerful and jolly company often. We were always great friends. I'd like a letter from him so much.

The box is for Gladys—who is for me now a pretty shadow I but half-remember—how I adored her when a boy.

I'm thought by good critics to be about the greatest poet in England, and I'm famous enough for anything. There will be a war poem of mine out before Xmas in the *Times* or *Sphere*, that'll make England jump. But what's the good, my son, when everything that makes life worth while has gone—when one lies in bed all day and can't even smoke. How I envy you ! I'd rather do the work than write the poems.

Your forgotten but not forgetful cousin,
Roy."

This letter, one of Flecker's last, reached his cousin Hubert ; and when the boy lay dead in a military hospital, soon after, it was found in his pocket. Flecker just managed to get this and his home parcel safely off. There was something for everyone, including " our good old Agnes," the maid at school, so devoted to him, who had to clean his cubicle by picking up his scattered litter as she went.

During December, Mr. Savery managed another visit

to him. They went through his last poems together, and Flecker confided certain literary arrangements to him.

In the last letter he wrote to his father, he said :—

"Parson read Evening Service over me yesterday. Lovely. (He'd so much rather have emptied himself in extempore prayer, poor man.)"

A nurse was still helping to look after him. But the great difficulty for those about him was that however worn out his body was, his busy, eager brain could not stop working ; ideas, theories, plans still came thronging. Still he polished his verse, still he "created beauty," and so it would and did go on, till the words rustled no more.

Throughout December, after the temporary improvement which followed the new treatment, Flecker was living in a condition of acute intellectual excitement. This was, no doubt, increased by his desire to make the most of Mr. Savery's visit. He had sent *The Burial in England* to *The Times*, and was awaiting the result with intense eagerness. Mr. Savery was only able to stay a very short time, and left Davos on Friday, December 11th. Flecker was then exceedingly exhausted, but in the evening he suddenly declared that there was nothing in the world the matter with him but bronchitis, and if only he could leave Davos and its dry air the very next day he would be better. He was semi-delirious and quite sleepless all the night.

As the days passed, and he recovered from the strain of his efforts to perfect his last poems, he gradually grew calmer, and acquiesced in the doctor's wish that he should stay on, at least for a while, at Davos. He deliberately rested, and by Christmas Day was sufficiently better to enjoy thoroughly his Christmas parcels, and not least the Dean Close plum pudding, which years before he had described as "the best known."

Unfortunately the Davos Chaplain was too ill to bring Flecker his Christmas Communion.

On December 29th the second volume of *Sinister Street* reached him, and he at once set to work to read it.

On New Year's Day, Friday, he had a bad relapse, and on Saturday his condition became very grave indeed. At 10 p.m. that night the doctor was called. He stayed for some hours, relieving him with injections and comforting him with his presence.

On the morning of Sunday, January 3rd, he became somewhat easier, and at his wife's request, since the regular Chaplain was ill, the Rev. A. F. Wall, who was staying at Davos, came and communicated Flecker. Mr. Wall was himself very ill, and died three months later. His act of devoted service comforted the dying man, who was able to thank him.

About 2 p.m. on Sunday afternoon, January 3rd, the restlessness returned. Once, towards the end, he murmured, "Lord, have mercy on my soul."

He died, quite peacefully, at 3.20 p.m. His body was placed in the crypt of the Anglican Church, at Davos, and the snow he detested fell so heavily afterwards, that the entrance was almost blocked. His family received the news, which even then came to them unexpectedly, on the evening of his death. Dr. Flecker was preaching at Christ Church, Cheltenham, when the telegram reached the school. On the Saturday night, when he was so desperately ill, Flecker would hardly be dissuaded from trying to write a last letter to his brother. He read a letter from Mr. Cooper, and then could do no more.

His wife could not contemplate leaving him in Davos, which he had disliked so intensely. After some delay, the navigation of the Channel being a matter of difficulty in January, 1915, she succeeded in bringing him, amid the roar of guns, to England in a British destroyer.

At Cheltenham, he was carried into the School Chapel, along the way his boyish feet had so often trod, and there he rested awhile in the old familiar place.

Later on, above the Chapel door, a memorial was put, bearing the inscription :—

In loving memory of their son,
H. E. Flecker,
Poet,
His sorrowing Parents have placed this tablet.

And thou shalt see the gleaming Worlds
As men see dew upon the grass.

Recently the tablet was removed to the wall just behind the headmaster's stall, in the school's new War Memorial Chapel.

Flecker is buried in the singularly beautiful cemetery just underneath the brooding Cotswolds, on the outskirts of Cheltenham. It is a fair place, encircled by the everlasting hills, in the country he loved best of all. A plain grey granite curb surrounds his turfed grave, and for the grey granite cross, engraved with his name and the dates, his wife chose the last six words of his *Hexameters*, prefixing them with the Invocation—

"O Lord, restore his realm to the dreamer."

Upon the cross hangs a wreath of bay, perpetually renewed. In the grass of the grave grow an Alexandrian Laurel and an Olearia Hastii, the gift of his mother, which are the nearest approach to *Oak and Olive* which cemetery rules and the English climate permit.

By what some men call Chance, two pines stand close by, and their murmuring is never stilled—

For pines are gossip pines the wide world through
And full of runic tales to sigh or sing.

Flecker, in spite of his many-sidedness, was obviously and always of one piece. What he was as a child, as a boy, as an undergraduate—not on the surface merely, but fundamentally—that he was still, only mellowed and developed by varied experience, when he died so prematurely at the age of thirty.

Lest, in regret over such a loss to English letters, some blame may be heedlessly thrown about, a plea for balanced judgment may not be out of place. It is just possible that over-eager partisans might be ready to seize on this apparent squandering of power as an opportunity for attacking the University system: in fact, stray murmurs have been heard to the effect that "Flecker is Shelley over again."

As a matter of fact, the two men, their circumstances, and the course of their lives are even curiously unlike. There is no evidence, *e.g.*, that Shelley was a craftsman in Flecker's rather technical sense: he had not Flecker's cast of cosmopolitanism; nor quite his passionate love for England, the so natural makeweight to his cosmopolitanism.

No one need much concern himself to pretend that Oxford as a whole saw that she was offered the chance of nourishing a genius, though Sir Walter Raleigh perceived Flecker's unusual promise: but it would take a rash man to deny his debt to that University, which, beyond cavil, he loved, and to which he returned, if only for a few days or even hours, in all possible crises of his life, so long as he remained in England.

The chief business of a University is, and must be, the fostering of sound learning and research. Speculation, pure and simple, or æsthetic theory are not, on the whole, such natural English interests as the pursuit of what people call knowledge.

Flecker's bent, as has been said by one and another, over and over again, was not towards academic scholarship, nor towards research. Creation, not acquisition, was his aim. A fellowship in an Oxford college, a life spent in guiding others to those matters of which Greats is the gate, is not the career for a poet.

The men whose business lies among these questions are the heavy cavalry of learning. Flecker was a skirmisher

of the infinite. It was neither Oxford's nor Flecker's fault that University rewards do not fit artists.

To others all these mundane schemings and arrangements will appear, in the last resort, irrelevant. To them it will seem, perhaps most truly, that in these tragic thirty years we have one more instance of that seemingly inevitable doom which ever waits on genius : that here, once again, we learn the lesson the Ancients knew, in the Classic lands he saw and loved—

Quem Di diligunt
Adolescens moritur.

EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE

The Development of Flecker's Art

"Les dix années qui suivent la disparition des hommes célèbres sont les années du silence et de la grande épreuve, le sévère noviciat de la gloire."—Alfred Poizat.

Whatever Time's final judgment may be on the permanent value of the poetry produced in England during the twentieth century's first quarter, it cannot be denied that the period was remarkable for and was distinguished by the number of its poets, and the quantity of verse actually published. When some of these writers, thereby almost forming themselves into that thing so alien to English custom, a "school," permitted the publication of selective anthologies from their published volumes, under a common title, *Georgian Poetry*, perhaps they unconsciously confessed to the most obvious charge which can be brought against them, viz., lack of conspicuous individuality, for even the few distinctive personalities among them become blurred in this shared method and view-point.

Flecker, though included twice, never seemed at home in their *Collections*. And still, ten years after his death, his slim *Golden Journey to Samarkand*, remains as singular, as fenced off from the rest, as when it was published first. In this country, where literature cannot be ranked among most men's leading interests, he, from the outset, took it seriously, always avoiding the opposite pitfall, the professional's pompous pose. In a day of unrest and experiment, of which he was very well aware, he still steered, compass in hand, on to a chosen goal, for he had already

heard
That old and fervent goddess call,
Whose voice is like a waterfall
And sweeter than the singing bird.

It is easy enough to call him a craftsman, which he was. With the mind and soul of an artist, he valued the mechanism of his art, and rising through and above it, he became a genuine seer and maker.

The circumstances of his life made anything like insularity of tastes and outlook impossible. A good classical education enabled him to appreciate Greek and Latin literature, though it has been made clear that he eschewed textual niceties and similar matters

of purely academic interest. This esteem never blinded him to the fact, which on the contrary he enjoyed proclaiming, that great poetry has been written by men who knew the Classics only or mainly through translations: he specially cited as examples Shakespeare, Goethe, and Keats.

His translations of Catullus, printed at the beginning of *Collected Poems*, belong probably to the years 1900–1904. It is significant that the opening lines of all are his rendering of Catullus' well-known dedication:—

For whom this pretty pamphlet, polished new
With pumice stone? Cornelius for you—

that "dry pumice stone," which during the twenty centuries separating Catullus from Flecker, all the greatest poets have deliberately used. He was but sixteen when, aiming already at the creation of beauty, he discovered the value and function of pumice stone, of that process which Erasmus, in his early youth, had confessed to when he spoke to William of Gouda of "my poor file."

This taste for translation, Flecker never lost. Lying fatally ill at Montana, he wrote to Mr. Goldring of his great project about Virgil. With a mixture of boyishness, the scholar-spirit and poetic enthusiasm, he wrote:—

> "The book is simply an attempt to do a translation of Virgil as satisfactory as Fitzgerald's *Omar*, a translation which will utterly eclipse the very numerous and very feeble attempts hitherto existing.
>
> Then, the prefaces will be as combative as Bernard Shaw's, and occupy some forty pages. They will be on the translation of sounds, on blank verse, on Hell literature, on preceding 'Translations of Virgil,' on 'Modern Scholarship,' on 'The Modern Spirit," etc., and should irritate everyone as effectually as my preface to *Samarkand*." [1]

During Dr. Flecker's stay at Montana, this was perhaps the project they discussed most often and most eagerly. Flecker's ill-health prevented its execution, and, finally, Mr. Squire published the finished section in *Collected Poems*. In the letter, already quoted, Flecker mentioned Hell literature. All through his work traces can be found of his abiding interest in the future life, and in the possibilities of the underworld. Though, at times, he vehemently resented and rejected certain phases and aspects of religion as they were presented to him, he was, beyond doubt, fundamentally religious. About him there was no pose of despising religion,

[1] *James Elroy Flecker*, by Douglas Goldring, p. 118.

certainly no trifling over the dread Four Last Things. In one of his late letters, which has been published, he wrote scathingly of "childish, anti-God rubbish"; adding, "we're about 200 years ahead of these asses on the continent, in the middle of a Catholic reaction, and we leave that sort of vulgarity to the plebs."[1]

Quite apart from such late-in-life influence, it is obvious that Flecker's mind had always, from time to time, brooded over the final and fundamental mysteries of human existence. *Tenebris Interlucentem* was not written by a man who knew nothing of and cared less about that which Francis Thompson called

> *These tidings from the vast*
> *. . . the heart-perturbing thing.*

It will be remembered that later on, Flecker rewrote that poem in a still more poignant form.

In *Prayer* the acuity of the pain is intensified by the Poem's undeniable sincerity. Again, there is the sharp fear or horror which vibrates through *No Coward's Song:* emotion still more evident in the *macabre* little poem, *The Town without a Market:*—

> *The Town without a Market, white and still,*
> *For six feet long and not a third as high*
> *Are those small habitations.*

Viewing the matter from another angle, it may be asked, where in English literature shall we find lines more saturated with desire for pure spirit-life than the *Song of the South-Gate Holder?*

O spiritual pilgrim rise: the night has grown her single horn:
The voices of the souls unborn are half adream with Paradise.

. . . . . .

God be thy guide from camp to camp: God be thy shade from well to well;
God grant beneath the desert stars thou hear the Prophet's camel-bell.

And God shall make thy body pure, and give thee knowledge to endure
This ghost life's piercing phantom-pain, and bring thee out to life again.

And God shall make thy soul a glass where eighteen thousand Æons pass,
And thou shall see the gleaming worlds as men see dew upon the grass.[2]

As death drew near, his attitude of horror lessened, which may be seen by a comparison of the last stanza of the youthful and of the later versions of *Narcissus.* The last was published posthumously in *The Old Ships.*

In this connexion, it is interesting to notice that the only considerable portion of the planned *Æneid*, left fit for publication,

[1] *James Elroy Flecker*, by Douglas Goldring, p. 119.
[2] This last line is graved on his memorial tablet in Dean Close Chapel.

was the descent of Æneas, under Hecate's guidance, to Avernus, in the sixth book :—

They went obscure in lowering, lone night
Through lodges of King Dis, untenanted.

If Flecker did not, as was perhaps inevitable, wholly succeed in rendering the great description of Charon, *terribili squalore*, at any rate he handled beautifully the description of the multitude of drifting souls—

Many as leaves that fall
Gently in autumn when the sharp cold comes
Or all the birds that flock at the turn o' the year
Over the ocean to the lands of light.

If his poems seem to owe more to Latin than to Greek, yet the influence of Greek literature is constantly apparent in his prose and in his poetry : it shows not least in his obvious love of the music of Greek names. But Flecker was far from being only a classical scholar. No man possessing his singular gift for translating a poem so that it was at once faithful to the original and at the same time a distinct creation could fail to value a first-hand knowledge of the vernacular of other European countries, if only that he might penetrate to the heart and soul of other literatures than his own.

He wrote while he was still young—"I want to learn German, because Germany has a fine literature."

His knowledge of and affection for French was, in an Englishman, remarkable. About 1904, he wrote to Mr. Sedgwick[1] of his discovery of "their surprising nineteenth century poets," and in particular of his admiration for Théophile Gautier. It will be remembered that after his comparative failure in "Mods." he bought French Authors lavishly and read them, not solely for the purposes of the Taylorian examination. In his Preface to *Samarkand*, written at Beirut in April, 1913, he mentioned a few French poets: Heredia, long known to and loved by him; Gautier and Leconte de Lisle, both old friends; and then Albert Samain, Moréas and Henri de Regnier, who almost certainly came in his way much later. The *Samarkand* Preface shows his regard for and careful study of the French Parnassians. After specially dwelling on Moréas, he branched off into a eulogy on Heredia :—

> "Read the works of Heredia if you would understand how conscious and perfect artistry, far from stifling inspiration, fashions it into shapes of unimaginable beauty."

Though he does not speak of them so definitely as this, it is not difficult to trace in his work the admiration he felt for Gautier and

[1] The letter will be found on p. 93.

Leconte de Lisle. Though he was never an unadulterated Parnassian, and at some periods was hardly touched by that school, no one can doubt his life-long attachment to the greatest among them, José-Maria de Heredia.

Here or there a man has won lasting fame almost or quite on the strength of a single poem. Heredia's rests on one volume which touched perfection. *Les Trophées*, published in Paris in 1893, was dedicated to his mother's memory: but its Preface reminded Leconte de Lisle that—

> "Un à un, vous les avez vus naître, ces poèmes. Ils sont comme des chaînons qui nous rattachent au temps déjà lointain, où vous enseigniez aux jeunes poètes, avec les règles et les subtils secrets de notre art, l'amour de la poésie pur et du pur langage français."

There it all is, that Parnassian standpoint which, in accordance with so important an element in himself, Flecker appreciated in Gautier, Leconte de Lisle and Heredia: an art, as it was, which sought discipline, possessed a subtle secret; which cared for poetry in and for itself, not because it might serve erudition, edification, or any other such thing; an art which demanded chiselled diction, language perfectly chosen and fit. Other poets, the great Greeks and Latins, not a few Orientals, Germans and some modern Frenchmen, Flecker knew and valued: but in his early manhood, specially at Oxford, of all non-English writers, these three Parnassian poets bulked largely in his thoughts and interests.

There is not adequate space here to set forth—not exactly his debt, for he was sufficiently original to avoid incurring the kind of debt which can be presented in words, but—his delight in Heredia's work. He cannot have missed or passed hastily by such lines as the last half of the octave of *Nymphée*:—

> *Le char plonge. La Mer, de son soupir puissant,*
> *Emplit le ciel sonore où la pourpre se traîne,*
> *Et, plus clair en l'azur noir de la nuit sereine,*
> *Silencieusement s'argente le Croissant;*

or, this other, from *Pan*:—

> *Il est doux d'écouter les soupirs, les bruits frais*
> *Qui montent à midi des sources inconnues,*
> *Quand le Soleil, vainqueur étincelant des nues*
> *Dans la mouvante nuit darde l'or de ses traits.*

The Poet of *Brumana*, of *A Ship, an Isle*, knew the value of these, and not less that of *Adonis*, and *Le Réveil d'un Dieu*.

It is the fashion nowadays to conduct school-children in parties

round museums. Some of us hope that if the practice does not prove to foster, at least it may not extinguish the possibility that, one day, some of them may steal back singly, in the spirit of Heredia :—

Vois. L'oblique rayon, le caressant encor,
Dans sa face camuse a mis deux orbes d'or ;
La vigne folle y rit comme une lèvre rouge ;

Et, prestige mobile, un murmure du vent,
Les feuilles, l'ombre errante et le soleil qui bouge,
De ce marbre en ruine ont fait un Dieu vivant ;[1]

or may go as Flecker, to escape the boredom of a London boarding house, went into an enchanted world :—

there's a hall in Bloomsbury
No more I dare to tread,
For all the stone men shout at me
And swear they are not dead ;
And once I touched a broken girl
And knew that marble bled.

Flecker believed that he and Heredia shared at least one quality : in a letter, once, he wrote :—

> " In all my exotic poems I feel that there should be a most vigilant humour in the pomp and parade of nicely chosen words. *Taoping* is almost a humorous poem. Perhaps this humour is a characteristic of my own. But I think a quality very like it makes Heredia superior to Leconte de Lisle."

Though, in that youthful Squib, *The Best Man*, Flecker had flung at the world the declaration, " Humour is an abortive attempt at wit," he never, in after-life, I believe, explained his theory of the connexion between the two. Though he spoke of himself as endowed with humour, surely his gift was wit, amazing wit, which flickers over *Taoping*—

the Commander, the old Mandarin,
Who never left his palace gates before,
But hath grown blind reading great books on war—

and comes to climax after climax in *Hassan*. Flecker's peculiarity lies in his habit of further pointing his wit by flinging it against a background of terror. Though some (for not everyone did), who understood the real tenour of his play, may have found the note of sheer physical pain pitched too high for their taste, yet the poignancy of the tenser scenes in *Hassan* was secured by a combination of terror and wit, so that it was hard to know which made the blood run colder. Now, even if Flecker be right, and Heredia possessed wit kindred to his own, at any rate he did not blend the

[1] *Les Trophées* : " Sur un Marbre brisé."

two in this devastating way. The terror can be found in *La Vision de Khem;* the wit in *Le Samouraï* and *Le Daïmio:* but Heredia keeps them apart: alway the French poet's emotion was less mixed, less subtly blent than Flecker's. In the *Samarkand* Preface, the latter said:—

> "Heredia wrote one volume of sonnets, they are traditional in form. Their subjects are classical or historical. They are utterly remote from modern life and turmoil. Each one evokes a distinct, complete, and delicate image of the past. And yet there is hardly one of them which is not immortal poetry, and the passion that breathes in the sonnets on Cleopatra is of such fiery intensity that I doubt if in all lyric poetry it could be excelled."

Here are some of the famous lines, at the crisis of their "fiery intensity":—

Tournant sa tête pâle entre ses cheveux bruns
Vers celui qu'enivraient d'invincibles parfums,
Elle tendit sa bouche et ses prunelles clairs;

Et sur elle courbé, l'ardent Imperator
Vit dans ses larges yeux, étoilés de points d'or,
Toute une mer immense où fuyaient des galères.

Heredia bound all that vehement emotion within the fettering limitations of a sonnet. It could be done because it was undiluted erotic passion. But when Flecker, as he was on rare occasions, was passionate, and in a setting as remote as any chosen by Heredia, his emotion was mixed: so, with the wider latitude of Tragedy, and yielding to his natural, temperamental complexity, he turns aside from the sheerly material and human horror of the Judgment and Torture scenes, to an intolerable sharpness of intellectual and spiritual anguish, and leaves in the bystander's shaken soul that haunting, tenuous misery of the ghosts, pleading in the cold shadowed moonlight with the Spirit of the Fountain.

There was in him an ineradicable "Romantic" strain, which was lacking to, or rather which was rejected by the more traditionally classical Parnassians. Once only, perhaps, did he owe a direct suggestion to Heredia. Though he attributed his inspiration to Daguerches' *Consolata, fille du Soleil,* and though he spoke of *Taoping* as half a jest, yet, whether consciously or not, it would seem to owe something to Heredia's *Le Prisonnier,* of which this is the Octave:—

Là-bas, les muezzins ont cessé leurs clameurs.
Le ciel vert, au couchant, de pourpre et d'or se frange;
Le crocodile plonge et cherche un lit de fange,
Et le grand fleuve endort ses dernières rumeurs.

Assis, jambes en croix, comme il sied aux fumeurs,
Le Chef rêvait, bercé par le haschisch étrange,
Tandis, qu'avec effort faisant mouvoir la cange,
Deux nègres se courbaient, nus, au banc des rameurs.

Even a slight acquaintance with modern French poetry would suffice to show, not indeed a source of Flecker's inspiration, but kindred lines to those on which his own unborrowed thought and feeling ran. This affinity with the French "moderns" differentiates him from the Georgians proper, who, rooted in their own environment and feelings seemed unwilling, at any rate for literary purposes, even to take the Dover mail-boat.

If this aspect of Flecker's poetry is to be considered in its time-order, then Baudelaire must come first, for though he had little or no lasting effect, he attracted Flecker early, and much more visibly than Mallarmé, who is mentioned only once (in *Forgotten Warfare*). Yet, caring as he did for the after-life, Flecker must at some time or other, it might be supposed, have paused over these haunting lines :—

Qui veut souvent avoir la Visite ne doit
Par trop de fleurs charger la pierre que mon doigt
Soulève avec l'ennui d'une force défunte.

Ame au si clair foyer tremblante de m'asseoir
Pour revivre il suffit qu'à tes lèvres j'emprunte
Le souffle de mon nom murmuré tout un soir.

With his youthful prejudice against philosophy, it was natural that he should fail to appreciate the more nebulous side of Mallarmé's work : not Flecker's was that strange

faim qui d'aucuns fruits ici ne se régale.

Though Flecker excelled in translation his rendering of Baudelaire's *Hymn to Satan* is one of his least happy efforts. How could he of all men and notwithstanding his pre-occupation with "Hell literature" reproduce that atmosphere? Who ever really gauged the riddling, almost sinister, wholly pathetic depths of Baudelaire's forlorn mind? Certainly not Flecker. He was too essentially and healthily alive, too naturally abounding in the joy of life, too much in love with this world's beauty really to grasp the standpoint of a man who could say with entire truth

mon cœur que jamais ne visite l'extase.

In the Envoy of a youthful poem Flecker might choose to call himself

The lean and swarthy poet of despair :

in some moods, he could say with Gautier—

Le poète est ainsi dans les Landes du monde ;
Lorsqu'il est sans blessure, il garde son trésor.
Il faut qu'il ait au cœur une entaille profonde
Pour épancher ses vers, divines larmes d'or !—

but by temperament, by inclination, and by his whole vigorous manner of life, he was incapable of grasping sympathetically so sphinx-like a creation as Baudelaire's Satan, who was the achievement of a man of inhuman or super-human repressions. Flecker might, and often did, suffer, and suffer acutely. But he always suffered vigorously. His was not the de-humanised, sardonic pain which shivers like a thin, dry, drear wind through *Les Fleurs du Mal.*

Probably, next to Heredia, the French poet whom Flecker in his younger days most esteemed was Théophile Gautier. Anyone could understand that the author of *The Town without a Market* would care for Gautier's *Coquetterie posthume*, and for its author.

But a poem, *L'Art*, in *Emaux et Camées* so exactly sets forth the method of both poets that its seems justifiable, though it may be found in Anthologies, to quote the most pertinent stanzas :—

Oui, l'œuvre sort plus belle
D'une forme au travail
Rebelle,
Vers, marbre, onyx, émail.
. . . . . .

Statuaire, repousse
L'argile que pétrit
Le pouce
Quand flotte ailleurs l'esprit,

Lutte avec le carrare,
Avec le paros dur
Et rare,
Gardiens du contour pur ;

Emprunte à Syracuse
Son bronze où fermement
S'accuse
Le trait fier et charmant ;

D'une main délicate
Poursuis dans un filon
D'agate
Le profil d'Apollon.

Peintre, fuis l'aquarelle,
Et fixe la couleur
Trop frêle
Au four de l'émailleur.

. . . . . .

Tout passe.—L'art robuſte
Seul a l'éternité.
Le buſte
Survit à la cité.

Et la médaille auſtère
Que trouve un laboureur
Sous terre
Révèle un empereur.

Les dieux eux-mêmes meurent,
Mais les vers souverains
Demeurent
Plus forts que les airains.

Sculpte, lime, cisèle ;
Que ton rêve flottant
Se scelle
Dans le bloc réſiſtant !

There, are enshrined the secrets of their workmanship: the Parnassian flight from mere facility; its tracking down and capture of the subtleſt, moſt elusive beauty; its preference for unyielding, enduring material—bronze, enamel, agate, or Carrara's hard marble; its chiselling and its gravure. It would be difficult indeed to outline a great poetic theory more fully and forcibly than Gautier has done in these few and beautiful lines.

A taſte common to him and Flecker is love of clarity—and of shifting light and changing hue, the mood which inspired Gautier's *Symphonie en Blanc Majeur :—*

Le marbre blanc, chair froide et pâle,
Où vivent les divinités,
L'argent mat, la laiteuse opale
Qu'irisent de vagues clartés ;—

though of the two, it was perhaps clarity, sharp-edged reality, which Flecker moſt prized in the Frenchman :—

As vivid as a cameo
Graved by the poet Gautier.

It was once said of Gautier, " il n'avait jamais aimé que le beau " : Flecker announced that his *Golden Journey* was " written with the single intention of creating beauty." Of Gautier, Baudelaire wrote, " Tout ce qui eſt brusque et cassé lui deplaît " ; and of Flecker, Mr. Squire observed, " He disliked the pedeſtrian and the wild."

The question of their temperamental affinity need not be further laboured. If by precept and example Gautier attracted Flecker, how could it be otherwise with Leconte de Lisle? Perhaps because, as Mr. Gosse once wittily suggested, he "is unsparing with the results of his erudition," Leconte de Lisle is not popular in England. Indeed, it would not be easy to find a poet further removed from ordinary English taste. His learning is too obvious, his artistic skill is too intensely cultivated and deliberate, his subjects, for the most part, are too irrevocably alien to win much attention from so untheoretical, so haphazard a race as ours. Yet, his work is exquisite: his poems, as Mr. Gosse declared, are like "the shapes covered with thin ivory and ornamented with gold and jewels in which the Greeks and even Phidias himself delighted. The *Poèmes Antiques* are, in fact, chryselephantine." An example may be found in the last two lines of *Vénus de Milo*:—

fais que ma pensée en rythmes d'or ruisselle,
Comme un divin métal au moule harmonieux.

Something of the same method distinguishes Flecker's poetry. Very early, he wrote the first draft of the poem which finally appeared thus:—

Had I the power
To Midas given of old
To touch a flower
And leave the petals gold
I then might touch thy face,
Delightful boy,
And leave a metal grace,
A graven joy.

Another instance occurs in a poem also written early, in which he reminded a friend that—

Decorous words beseem the learned lip,
But poets have the nicer scholarship.
In English glades they watch the Cyprian glow
And all the Mænad melodies they know.
They hear strange voices in a London street,
And track the silver gleam of rushing feet;
And there are things that come not to the view
Of slippered dons who read a codex through.
O honeyed Poet, will you praise no more
The moonlit garden and the midnight shore?

In his curious fantasy, *The Hammam Name*, he contrived a not dissimilar effect:—

Ah, I tremble to disclose
How the shell came off the almond, how the lily showed its face,
How I saw a silver mirror taken flashing from its case.

No one will wholly appreciate Flecker who has not perceived his intense and penetrating love of words :—

> " The critic must have an ear no less subtle than the poet's. . . . Words must call up to him all their sweet associations of sound and sense. The word ' road ' must mean for him not merely one particular road, but all the roads in the world whereon men walk like pilgrims from the grey of dawn to the terror of the sunset."

The fine workmanship of the Parnassians not only attracted Flecker, but eventually tempted him into very pointed criticism of some contemporary English work, which, in comparison, seemed to him unjointed, slipshod, shallow, crude. How was it possible for him, with that combination of artistic sensitiveness and boyish mischief, to resist telling these young experimenters in the inane to make " a careful study of this theory, however old-fashioned it may by now have become in France " ?

It was not only the craftsmanship of Leconte de Lisle which charmed Flecker. Both men had a strand of the fantastic woven into the texture of his thought : it appears occasionally in the *Poèmes Antiques*, and, more naturally, in the *Poèmes Barbares*. Based on an ancient and popular Swedish legend, wrested, as was his habit with legends, to his own purpose, *Les Elfes* remains as evidence of his sheer love of a fine-spun species of fantasy. How could Flecker with his passion for the gleaming world of transient visions resist " l'opale magique," or " Ma robe filée au clair de la lune " ?

Both poets wove with glistening, fairy threads, Leconte de Lisle in his " Elves," and Flecker in *Lord Arnaldos* (a translation), in *Santorin*, in *Hyali*, and in *Bryan of Brittany*. Possibly, the still more strikingly fantastic, and less generally known poem, *Néférou-Ra*, sent some flickering recollection through Flecker's brain as he wrote *Taoping*. Yet another quality, Gautier, Leconte de Lisle and Flecker all possessed, to a remarkable degree, the gift of steeping life in light. No one will forget those lines in *Bryan*—

> *Home she came with the West in her eyes,*
> *Driving her silver sheep.*[1]

[1] Mary Coleridge, years before, had used this same image, in an eldritch poem, *Unwelcome* :—

> We were young, we were merry, we were very, very wise,
> And the door stood open at our feast,
> When there passed us a woman with the West in her eyes,
> And a man with his back to the East—

and from that instant all went awry with their good cheer.

Flecker wrote *Bryan*, which he said is a Greek story, towards the end of his life, long after *Unwelcome* had been published. He does not seem to be aware of this other use and meaning of the image.

While Flecker was at Caius, he was not only working strenuously at Oriental languages, but in hours of legitimate or stolen leisure he was voraciously reading modern literature; specially France's "surprising nineteenth century poets." From 1902, when he went to Oxford, to 1910, when he left Cambridge, he was reading all the modern poetry, specially French, on which he could lay hands. It may be remembered that Mr. Frank Savery, referring particularly to the years 1906–1911, said: "His literary judgment, as expressed in his letters and exemplified in his writings, had improved suddenly and phenomenally."[1]

But since Flecker was just then in his middle 'twenties, a not unusual period of intellectual development, and was not only using his time most diligently in wide and varied reading, but in the latter years was living in Eastern Europe and Asia, the ripening is perhaps less surprising than accountable. Very early he set before himself a definite, clearly-cut literary object; not a universal practice among English writers. Those, particularly poets, who have deliberately set themselves to cultivate the "art" of literature, are comparatively few in this country. Milton, Gray, and—after a rather sharp reception from reviewers—Tennyson are conspicuous exceptions to our rather haphazard methods.

Apparently Flecker needed no such awakening as Tennyson's. Perhaps, in Maeterlinck's sense, he was *un averti*. Anyhow he never wasted his literary days on futile carelessness; even in his most exuberant moments at Oxford, he never laid aside the workman's spirit. He, like the French Parnassians, "avait le culte souverain de l'Art, et le mépris pour l'exécution facile," so he spent his few years searching with diligent vehemence for perfection. The more certainly the end approached, the more intensely he strove. In the midst of a generation which developed a taste for the vague, the amorphous, the untidy, for anything and everything uncertain and perilously in solution, Flecker became increasingly definite, lucid and chiselled, both in matter and form. Among a medley of writers who gloried in abrupt noise and crashing discords, and more still in verse devoid of rhythm and pleasant sounds, Flecker was slowly working his way, till at last he attained to that strange music, unique in English poetry, which in *Hassan* trembles along strings more plangent than any earthly violin's. So exquisite is all the language in this play that many people seem to forget, if they ever noticed, how very little actual verse it contains.

Perhaps his singular addiction to translation was, in a measure, due to his care for workmanship. He practised the art assiduously from the Catullus poems of his schoolboy life, through those days of his desire to produce the one perfect English rendering of

[1] *Collected Poems*. Introduction, p. xiv.

Virgil, down to the beautiful versions in his posthumous volume, *The Old Ships*. Four from French were included there. Moréas' *La Rose du Jardin* was not from *Les Stances*, but *Le Figaro*.[1] The choice from Regnier is a little strange perhaps; other poems would have seemed more sympathetic to Flecker. Undoubtedly the best were his renderings of Paul Fort's *Philomèle*, the finest of them all, and of Albert Samain's *Pannyre aux Talons d'Or*.

Though the spirit and aroma of one language can never be wholly rendered in another, yet in Flecker's hands translation was a living and delicate art. In June, 1913, he wrote to Mr. Goldring, "I have some glorious translations from Paul Fort and other modern Frenchmen; but I preferred to keep *The Golden Journey* original from beginning to end."

At their best, as, for example, in *Philomel*, his translations came very near to being originals.

With this care for fine workmanship, or rather as part and parcel of it, went his amazing patience with and attention to adverse criticism of or demands for explanations of his poetry. It has been said, though very likely without foundation, that Tennyson being asked once for an explanation of lines, observed that his function was to supply the British public with poetry not brains. But Flecker was open to fault-finding, and would cheerfully explain. His letter about *The Dying Patriot* is apposite. Of that incident, Mr. Cooper wrote recently: "I had an idea at one time that I would take his *Thirty-six Poems* and go through them carefully and send him notes on them, but it never came to anything. . . . I made one venture in the case of *The Dying Patriot*, he wrote back and answered my questions. I had quite misunderstood the main significance of the poem, though I had rightly interpreted most of the allusions. He was not annoyed at my letter, in fact he seemed grateful for it."[2]

Probably, had Mr. Cooper carried out his first plan, Flecker would have given it similar attention.

He showed the same sort of patience with journalistic criticism. Mr. Goldring has related the history of his own review in *The Academy* of Flecker's *Bridge of Fire*. Having secured it for review, he admits that "the book did not at all come up to my expectations." When he had administered "a sincere if rather jejune 'slating,'" he found that "all our little circle was scandalised. Everyone, indeed, was extremely angry with me—except Flecker." *The Bridge of Fire* was, what a young writer is peculiarly sensitive over, Flecker's first book.

[1] December 3rd, 1903.
[2] Cf. Chapter vi., p. 167.

He retained this attitude right down to the last days of desperate illness; when in answer to criticism in a review[1] of his *Brumana*, he, after careful winnowing of possible words, in a vigorous, eager search which gravely taxed his fading strength, substituted "mantling" for "blushing." To some people, poets may seem a touchy race. Flecker himself, acknowledging this review, jestingly wrote of them as "the vainest of mankind." Some few critics have attempted to fasten on him an accusation of literary arrogance and complete absorption in his own work. Yet here, in the very heart of his poetry, in *Brumana*, whose "gossip pines" were the counterpart of those early ones in the dear far-off holiday days, he was, to use his own word in his letter about it, "humble," and accepted criticism as it was meant. He was so fundamentally an artist, so utterly purposed to perfect his work at every cost and at all hazards, that he not only bore but welcomed and used criticism of all kinds and from any direction. Of how many of his contemporaries could that be truly said? The charge of conceit, the worse charge, of vanity falls to the ground before such debonair readiness to listen.

Perhaps the real cause of some captious criticism was his undeniable singularity, a quality which acts as a powerful irritant on many people. He had the unique kind of genius which can never be lost in the ruck of mere ability If anyone will pretend to have found his analogue in our literature, who is it? George Eliot once declared that of all human faults that of prophecy is the most gratuitous. Even in face of that, it is tempting to predict that the generations in front of us as they sift the Georgian years, will say: This Flecker was unique in his own day, and in the days before him, no one quite matched him, and he still stands alone, original, challenging.

It was a necessary consequence of this quality that he could accord to his contemporaries—or to most of them, for he excepted, for admiration, Mr. A. E. Housman [2] and Mr. de la Mare,[3] and Mr. W. B. Yeats [4]—no warmer greeting than a carefully discriminating criticism. His was a severely winnowing fan. His claim to wield it has perhaps been overlooked. It rested upon the width and grasp of his critical power. The opening sentences of his early and unfinished article on *The New Poetry* are an excellent instance of his fundamental breadth of view. Being himself:—

"The man who treats poetry as a scholar treats his classics,

[1] *An English Parnassian. The Englishwoman*, December, 1913.
[2] See *The New Poetry. Collected Prose*, pp. 222, et seq.
[3] "Paul Fort . . . is hardly more known to the general public than was the classicist Moréas, or, to take an English example, that fine poet, Mr. de la Mare." (*Collected Prose*, p. 264.)
[4] *Collected Prose*, pp. 208 and 258.

> with loving care and affectionate reverence, the man who loves the muse Euterpe because she is so beautiful and not because she is the sister of Clio or the handmaid of Urania,"—

he could realise, and this in spite of his anti-message diatribes in the *Samarkand* Preface;—

> "The attitude of that outer circle of readers, those veritable amateurs, who loving poetry less intelligently but not less sincerely than himself, yet are not content with vivid fancies, delicate thoughts and sweet expressions and powerful harmonies, but seek, in what they read, for a statement of philosophy, or at least a uniform and attractive view of the World, Life and Love." [1]

He added a criticism on his contemporaries, which after some fifteen years seems to be unfortunately true still:—

> "Modern poetry appears to be in so chaotic a state, that it is impossible to trace any new movements, or the prevalence of any distinctive new idea."

Flecker's insistence on workmanship, and especially the famous *Preface*, led some of the few who discovered him during his life-time to believe that he was a Parnassian pure and simple.

This hasty conclusion is not even justified by the Preface; for when he had swept the poetic heavens with a telescope and garnered their glories, he still remained—himself, with his own unshaken individuality.

If anyone will read the *Samarkand* Preface carefully and candidly, he will see that Flecker said, first, that having searched his own mind, he found there, "no new theory." Secondly, that he could admire the Parnassian theory which, for him, had "a unique attraction." Thirdly, that he ruled out deliberately and with violence all message-mongering in poetry: he said he considered it "corrupting." Fourthly, he believed that current English poetry stood "in need of some such saving doctrine" (*i.e.*, as Parnassianism), at the moment when he was writing, "to redeem it from the formlessness and the didactic tendencies . . . in fashion." Lastly, he declared that *The Golden Journey* was "written with the single intention of creating beauty."

A sentence in *The Grecians*, philosophical rather than literary, throws a little further light: "To my mind a passion for beautiful things is the possession of the wise and thoughtful, or at least it is only of value to the intelligent."

If these pronouncements be, so far as is possible, combined together, and carefully weighed, they may, possibly, still seem

[1] *Collected Prose*, p. 215.

ambiguous and insufficient; though even so, they are, specially in England, where theory of all kinds follows so haltingly on practice, no mean contribution to literary thought: supplied, too, by a man who died at 30, and whose character was, all his life long, marked by a strand of boyishness. But in no case can they help to prove that Flecker was irrevocably a Parnassian. Certainly, he never made the mistake with which Alfred Poizat charged Mallarmé, of supposing that the Parnassians had touched the high-water mark of perfection in poetry, and that beyond their finest achievement no one could ever go. At the outside, he reckoned them among the world's great "song-smiths." His special emphasis on them was due to his belief that just then and there they supplied, as no one else quite could, what his contemporaries most needed, if they were to be saved from their rather unfortunate fluency and facility.

Flecker was no "decadent," taking the word in Poizat's admirable sense:—

"Confondre la poésie avec les beaux vers est une idée décadente!"

Beautiful verses Flecker made indeed, but not as the decadent, solely for formal beauty's sake. To him, poetry was the shining vesture of significance, intention, emotion.

It must not be forgotten that another great school, the *Symbolistes*, had followed the French Parnassians. No doubt the *Symbolistes* over-emphasised "content," even to the point of some loss of lucidity, as some Parnassians had over-insisted on form at the expense of content. But Flecker in England, like the remarkable Frenchman Albert Samain, whom in the middle years of his creative life he came to study and admire, could take the best of both schools, assimilate it, and then make the blended whole serve his own original and individual purposes. The results, differing as the two poets' temperaments differed, exist in Samain's three volumes of Poems, with one collection of Prose Tales, in Flecker's *Collected Poems*, and much of *Hassan*.

No doubt, always and to the end, Samain, retaining something of the *Symboliste* attitude, could say—

J'adore l'indécis, les sons, les couleurs frêles,
Tout ce qui tremble, ondule, et frissonne, et chatoie;

while Flecker never lost his addiction to the Parnassian choice of high lights and clearly cut edges. *Phœacia*, though Flecker called it "a rotten poem," and Samain's *Promenade à l'Etang* will show these diverging tendencies well. A more interesting because far subtler study of their divergencies might be found in a comparison of

Flecker's *Stillness*, one of his very latest poems, and Samain's *Silence*, especially the last stanzas :—

Il est des heures d'agonie
Où l'on rêve la mort bénie
Au long d'une étreinte infinie.

La lampe douce se consume ;
L'âme des roses nous parfume.
Le Temps bat sa petite enclume.

Oh ! s'en aller sans nul retour,
Oh ! s'en aller avant le jour,
Les mains toutes pleines d'amour !

Oh ! s'en aller sans violence
S'évanouir sans qu'on y pense
D'une suprême défaillance . . .

Silence ! . . . Silence ! . . . Silence ! . . .

First, there is the overwhelming difference between the man actually face to face with immediately impending death, as Flecker was, when he wrote *Stillness*, and one, like Samain, imagining, when at the worst he was but tired and disillusioned, what death might be, how it might come. But there is besides a temperamental diversity. Samain, though never a " whole-time " *Symboliste*, had that school's leaning towards a nostalgic, sombre-hued, dreamy presentation of life. While Flecker, who worked always " in hard substances," possessed to the end an ineradicable, tense and unconquerable vigour. Nothing but *force majeure* could compel his physical surrender, and not that could change his aim, subdue his spirit, or dim the clarity of his vision.

Even when, in very early youth, Flecker sang of—

A voiceless, dreamless Paradise
Of fleeting and fantastic form
More lonely than the fierce sunrise
More visionary than the storm,

he did not lose himself in molten sentimentality.

It must be remembered, too, that though his general trend was along the lines of *Symbolisme*, yet, at times, Samain wrote poems of quite another kind, such even as might have come from Baudelaire—*Hérode, Une*, etc. In an entirely different vein again were his chivalrous sonnets on Versailles :—

Tout un monde galant, vif, brave, exquis et fou,
Avec sa fine épée en verrouil, et surtout
Ce mépris de la mort, comme une fleur, aux lèvres.

Not the least attractive of Samain's qualities in Flecker's eyes must have been this variety of interest.

Their most striking point of similarity is their capacity to appreciate various poetic methods, and to mould them to their several purposes. Only for a very short time, if Mr. Cooper is right,[1] did Flecker give any assent to the ambiguous catch-phrase—Art for Art's sake: of Samain it may be said that he never did. At their most decorative and pictorial, neither could be called superficial. Flecker's *A Ship, an Isle, a Sickle Moon*, is a good instance of his intense love of pictures. A similar example may be found in Samain's stanza, on the fly-leaf of *Le Chariot d'Or* :—

Une coupe en cristal d'eau pure à demi pleine,
Où baigne, solitaire et suave, une fleur,
Une rose de chair, d'idéale couleur,
Et qui fait défaillir un ciel à son haleine.

These are more than beautiful verses; they plunge through the surface to the depths of emotion. But they cannot be analysed for the unseeing any more than a proof that the whole is greater than its part could be furnished to the mathematically deficient.

Their attitude to colour is another link between these two poets. Flecker's love of it appeared in his childhood over the railway signals, and it lasted to the end.

Eméraude in *Le Chariot d'Or* and *Améthyste*, rescued from his unfinished poems, in the posthumous *Aux Flancs du Vase* are, from opposite angles, conspicuous examples of Samain's treatment of colour. But they do not care for the same colours, nor for the same atmospheric effects: Flecker's were sharper, more brilliant.

Home she came with the West in her eyes

is a whole world away from Samain's

le Crépuscule triste
Ouvre ses yeux d'Amèthyste
Mouillès.

Flecker never lost his head over either of these two French "movements," probably because he lived after the crisis of both. While it is not difficult to grasp the meaning and intention of Parnassianism, it is easy to miss the secret of Symbolism. Monsieur Walch, writing of humanity at large, declared that—

> "L'homme placé entre deux éternités . . . ne sait d'où il vient, il ne sait où il va . . . mais il est éperdument désireux de l'Infini."

[1] "In *later* years we often talked on the 'Art for Art' controversy. At one time he seemed to me to have taken such an extreme position in regard to this question that it seemed that for him poetry could only be called poetry when it had been emptied of all thought and content. But I do not think that this mood of his lasted very long."

While it is true of us all that we are "fixed between two eternities," Monsieur Walch is perhaps hyper-sanguine in attributing to the majority of mortals a wild desire for the Infinite. So many eyes seem fixed so far on this side of Infinity. But no doubt those of us who are "éperdument désireux de l'Infini," do, as a rule, become prophets or disciples of *Symbolisme*, of that which Arthur Symons once described as "the secret of things which is just beyond the most subtle words."

In a recent book,[1] M. Robert de la Vaissière has hazarded yet a new definition of *Symbolisme* :—

> "Les Symbolistes firent couler beaucoup d'encre pour expliquer la différence qu'ils voyaient entre l'allégorie et le symbole. Cette différence ne se résume-t-elle pas en ceci: dans l'allégorie les rapports entre le signe et la chose signifiée sont intellectuels, et dans le symbole, ils ne le sont pas?"

Whether or no this is true of *Symbolisme* it puts into words a marked trait in Flecker's work, for there intellect and feeling were never disjoined. *Symbolisme* is not just one more literary theory, and no more. It is an attitude to life, born of an acute awareness, not, so it would seem, possessed by all men; that kind of quick spiritual perception which inspired Regnier—

Un petit roseau m'a suffi
A faire chanter la forêt.

. . . . . .

Ceux qui passent en leur pensées
En écoutant, au fond d'eux-mêmes
L'entendront encore et l'entendent
Toujours qui chante.

Exposed to ridicule through the absurdities of *poseurs*, *Symbolisme* is, in itself and at its best, not only magnificently real, but an inevitable, integral part of human thought, at least as essential, in its proper place, as the Parnassian *facture soignée* and its *passion du beau.*

To those who lived through the *Symboliste* Movement, the temptation to scout it as folly, or to laud it as impeccable, was urgent; but Flecker, born seventeen years later than the most notable English *Symboliste*, Ernest Dowson, could more accurately appraise it.

To disentangle the purpose and value of the real thing from such witty substitutes as *Les Déliquescences d'Adoré Floupette*, with which

[1] *Anthologie Poétique du XX^e Siècle*, Vol. I., p. xiv.

Gabriel Vicaire and Henri Beauclerc threw dust in unsuspecting eyes, was not entirely easy on the spur of the moment, even to so acute an intelligence as Dowson's. After all, how broad is the dividing line between his—

In music I have no consolation
No roses are pale enough for me ;
The sound of the waters of separation
Surpasseth roses and melody,

and the hypothetical Adoré's incomparable stanzas on *Suavitas ?*—

L'adorable Espoir de la Renoncule
A nimbé mon cœur d'une Hermine d'Or,
Pour le Rossignol qui sommeille encor,
Le candeur du Lys est un crépuscule.

. . . . . .

O Pleurs de la Nuit ! Etoiles moroses !
Votre aile mystique effleure nos fronts,
La vie agonise et nous expirons
Dans la mort suave et pâle des Roses !

But for Flecker, when the froth of the Movement had been blown away, and only its basis remained, no such difficulties arose.

If we compare Adoré's absurdities and Dowson's melancholy with *The Queen's Song* or with its original draft, *The Golden Head*, as it appeared in *The Bridge of Fire*, we shall see that from first to last, though he might include in his earliest volume such a poem as *Anapaests*, Flecker was fundamentally of Gautier's mind. Always, he was working in " hard " substances. However highly he valued *Symbolisme*, literary vagueness and indecision were no permanent affair of his.

In one more respect Flecker and Samain were alike. Coteries and poetic cliques may have their proper place and value, but they are a little apt to be blind to everything outside their own boundaries. Whatever their value, Samain, in the French 'nineties, partly from circumstances but mainly from choice, remained outside them, pursuing with rare courage his steep and solitary way. In Georgian England, again partly from circumstances and also from choice, Flecker stood apart from his contemporaries. This man, who as a Civil Servant,—one, too, who took pride in doing his Consular work excellently—had learned eight or nine modern languages, could hardly remain insular.

Moreover, in his knowledge of and disillusionment in the East, he stands apart from his contemporaries. He wrote of it with the point and balance which spring from first-hand knowledge.

He never had any part with those who tried to escape from themselves and from literary London by toying with untravelled lands called by exotic names.

Of the French poets mentioned by Flecker in his earlier years, there remains Jean Moréas. His influence was certainly very slight, though some might suppose that it can be seen in such poems as *Hyali, Santorin,* and *A Ship, an Isle.* But even supposing they bear some kind of resemblance to *Les Stances,* that surely arises from the fact that Flecker knew Athens, and the sea, and the Isles of Greece, and that Moréas was born and educated for many years in Athens, and that each, as Moréas said of himself, revelled in all the French poets on whose works he could lay hands.

Moréas is sometimes said to have "passed through *Symbolisme.*" Really, he shed its alien fatuities, while to the end he retained its secret, called by Brunetière, with tardy justice, "un rapport secret du sensible avec l'intelligible."

Moréas died in 1910: like Flecker, he polished his verse to the end. Both were extraordinarily responsive to new enthusiasms, questing after Infinity—infinite apprehension, infinite appreciation, infinite achievement. They, and Samain too, explored "theories," synthesised them and then transcended the synthesis, as they passed out to wider territories and sunnier spaces. They all knew that the antithesis so often set up between Thought and Beauty is false, because they never can be mutually identical or exclusive. Beauty is neither a pure abstraction nor a concrete possession, but a quality in things. Thought can be as beautiful, as ugly or as mediocre and dull as any other human achievement or possession. Because they knew this, Moréas, Samain, and Flecker all abhorred and eschewed the crudity of the Message-theory.

No doubt can exist that Flecker cared greatly for modern French literature. But there was another and wholly different literary interest in his life, viz., his taste for and knowledge of the East.

Early in his life he was acquainted with Sir Richard Burton's Writings. The *Kasîdah* being difficult to obtain, Flecker copied it out. It no doubt gave him the musical names for Plato and Aristotle in *The Ballad of Iskander,* possibly the name *Mansur,* the title of a Prose Sketch; and the Camel-bells of *The Golden Journey* and *The Gates of Damascus.*

But the philosophy of the *Kasîdah* is not Flecker's; in his poetry he did not concern himself with the fundamental problems of religion, morals and philosophy. Further, though it may seem temerarious to say so, Sir Richard Burton's problems, however he may have handled them in his own way, were those which perplexed many of the *intelligentsia* of the Victorian 'fifties and

'sixties; problems, which if eternal, made a quite differently expressed appeal to Youth in the early twentieth century.

Yet, as Poetry, the *Kasîdah* may have had some little influence on Flecker's earlier verse:—

The Wolf-tail sweeps the paling East to leave a deeper gloom behind,
And Dawn uprears her shining head, sighing with semblance of a wind.

. . . . . .

The Golden Gates swing right and left; up springs the Sun with flaming brow.
The dew-cloud melts in gush of light: brown Earth is bathed in morning-glow.

Slowly they wind athwart the hill, and while young Day his anthem swells,
Sad falls upon my yearning ear the tinkling of the Camel-bells.

Much less obviously, but still perhaps discernibly, is there a kinship of outlook between the two poets in these couplets:—

How short this Life, how long withal; how false its weal, how true its woes,
This fever-fit with paroxysms to mark its opening and its close.

Ah! gay the day with shine of sun, and bright the breeze and blithe the throng,
Met on the River-bank to play, when I was young, when I was young:

. . . . . .

And now the last hath slipt away yon drear Death-desert to explore,
And now one Pilgrim worn and lorn still lingers on the lonely shore.

Yes, Life in Youth-tide standeth still; in Manhood streameth soft and slow,
See, as it nears the abysmal goal, how fleet the waters flash and flow.

Even the closing verses of the *Kasîdah* which Burton strove to raise above the pessimism of the rest were still far enough from the vigorous hopefulness which no difficulty could quench in Flecker. Yet one link bound the two together, for both had caught

The Whisper of the Desert-wind; the tinkling of the Camel's bell.

Besides the works of Sir Richard Burton, Flecker had studied the *Arabian Nights* in Mardrus' version. In spite of its bulk, he sent for it from Leysin.

Again, as a natural result of his Interpretership, Flecker gradually acquired, at Cambridge, and in the following years in the East, a considerable knowledge of Oriental languages and literatures. He possessed a volume—which, unlike some of his books, he marked with quaint little signs apparently betokening degrees of appreciation—Adolphe Thalasso's *Anthologie de l'Amour Asiatique*, which had been published in 1907, by the *Mercure de France*. These

songs, which he turned into French verse, and so published, M. Thalasso picked from all parts and corners of Asia, from Syria to China, from Armenia to India, from Japan and Annam to Circassia.

The War-Song of the Saracens, which Mr. Goldring published in 1910 in a magazine he was then editing, seems a little solitary among the rest of Flecker's work, and perhaps a trifle irrelevant in *Hassan* itself. The reader of this *Anthologie* may wonder if it did not owe its existence to a particularly fine *Chant de Guerre* which M. Thalasso found in Altaï, and rendered in stirring verse. The following stanzas must suffice :—

ii.

Aux cheveux soyeux, rouges comme des charbons ardents,
Aux cheveux soyeux, noirs comme des charbons éteints,
Aux cheveux qui posent l'aurore ou la nuit sur les têtes,
Nous préférons le " tough," flottant dans les mêlées,
Le " tough " formé par les crins dorés ou noirs
Que nous arrachons à la queue de nos fougueux coursiers.

iii.

Aux seins blancs et luisants des gorges vierges
Et durs comme les aciers trempés trois fois
Et ronds comme les coupes de marbre
D'où s'échappent les parfums grisants et subtils,
Nous préférons l'éclat de nos sabres trempés trois fois,
Et le luisant de nos boucliers ronds comme d'immenses coupes.

iv.

Aux flèches assassines d'un œil noir
Rendu plus noir encore par l'arc des sourcils
Et le khol *dont les plaisirs amoureux cernent la paupière,*
Marquée ainsi d'un volupté donnée et reçue
Nous préférons les flèches assassines que tend notre arc dans la mêlée des batailles.

Flecker probably valued this book chiefly for those poems which he could not read in the original: those, at any rate, are what he marked. One from Beluchistan, *A Song of the People*, is radiant with his favourite colours, blue, gold, silver. The rest which he singled out are from China and Japan: Chi-King's *At the Western Gate:* Li-Po's *On the Banks of Jo-heh*[1]*;* Cha'ng-Sing's *Song of the Nenuphars*[1]*;* and, most heavily marked of all, Tin-Tun-Ling's *The Shadow of the Orange-Blossoms*. Tu-Fu has been described by Captain Cranmer Byng as " of all Poets, the first in craftsmanship." He included four of his poems in *A Lute of Jade*, which, though it appeared in 1909, possibly did not fall under Flecker's notice.

[1] English renderings of these are given in Captain Cranmer Byng's *A Lute of Jade*.

Three other poems of Tu-Fu he published in *A Feast of Lanterns*, but he did not include this, the only one chosen by M. Thalasso to represent this distinguished poet, surnamed The Flower of Elegance; and which Flecker marked :—

Très rapide, ma barque suit le fil de l'eau, et mes
yeux suivent le cours du fleuve.
Là-haut dans la nuit claire, courent de fins nuages.
La nuit claire est aussi dans l'eau : lorsque un nuage
glisse sur la lune, je le vois glisser sur le fleuve,
Et il me semble que ma barque vogue sur le ciel,
Et je pense à ma bien-aimée qui se mire ainsi
dans mon cœur.

It is quite easy to understand his appreciation of that.

Of the Japanese Poems, he was, apparently, specially attracted by two only. Among the poems from Hindustan and Persia are several *ghazels* of the type of Yasmin; one of Hassan's speeches, though in prose, resembles them :—

> " O rose of morning and O rose of evening, vainly for me shall you fade on domes of ebony or azure. This rose has faded, and this rose is bitter, and this rose is nothing but the world."

The influence on Flecker of M. Thalasso's *Anthologie* may have been slight, but it is just traceable, among a multitude of converging currents.

The story of the actual composition of *Hassan* has been told by himself in letters, by his wife, and by Mr. Squire. There is no need to repeat it here. It will suffice to say that it is obvious that from his Cambridge days to the end of his Consular life in the East, his mind was constantly occupied with Oriental literature of many kinds.

When his health finally broke at Beirut, in 1913, and he went to Leysin, he there found many volumes of the Poems of Paul Fort. Always ready and eager for fresh experience and enthusiasms, Flecker devoured them. Though the suggestion has been challenged, it is difficult to believe that Fort did not stimulate Flecker's dying but still vigorous energy to rather new efforts. Certainly, according to his own showing, Fort's abounding enthusiasm over the Universe of Existence brought refreshment to those hours in Switzerland when, had he not toiled on at his Art, and kept his mind and will and heart open to all the promptings of Beauty, Flecker would have had little to do save

Half to forget the wandering and the pain,
Half to remember days that have gone by,
And dream and dream that I am home again.

Like Flecker, Fort rejoiced in clear-shining light, in particular colours, the ever-present silver and gold, red, dark-green, and constantly recurring blue. Both cared for the changing shades on mother-of-pearl, for the iridescences of highly polished metallic surfaces, to which Flecker added the still subtler delight of exquisite textures. But whatever taste for all these Fort may have quickened, they had every one appeared years before in Flecker's work. There is, for example, that masterly study of colour in his very early and perhaps not duly appreciated poem, *The Ballad of Iskander* :—

The ship all black and the ship all white
Met like the meeting of day and night,
Met, and there lay serene dark-green
A twilight yard of the sea between.

Light and colour are close allies ; Fort has an amazing capacity for conveying impressions of exceedingly different light-effects. Before he met Fort's work, Flecker had been conspicuous among English poets for his passion for light. Fort boldly declared—

cette loi première : nul n'aime la
Beauté sans aimer la lumière.

And Flecker, with passionate longing, cried—

I know the countries where the white moon burns,
And heavy star on star
Dips on the pale and crystal hills :
I know the river of the sun that fills
With founts of gold the lakes of orient sky.

In another well-known passage, he mingles light and colour inextricably :

The dragon-green, the luminous, the dark, the serpent-haunted sea,
The snow-besprinkled wine of earth, the white-and-blue-flower foaming sea.

The two men differed intellectually more than in æsthetic tastes. As Fort was born in 1872, and Flecker twelve years later, by 1913, the Frenchman was the maturer poet. Moreover, though no one could call him a message-monger, he is a thinker to such a degree that it might fairly be said that speculation is one of his main concerns. He cares to have and to present a philosophy, however hard others may have to work to disentangle it. On the contrary, we know that at Oxford, at any rate, Flecker poured open scorn on philosophy as such, very likely without knowing much about it then. Fort's somewhat bewildering philosophy is most

deliberately expounded in *Vivre en Dieu.* He sweeps mere dialecticians lightly aside :—

> " Rions un peu des sages. Ils s'étonnent de tout. Moi qui suis dieu je crée tout ce dont je m'étonne. Entendez-moi bien : dieu ? Je veux dire un tel homme qu'il peut rêver sa vie d'un bout à l'autre bout."

In this matter, Fort was a little more conscious of and a little more responsible for his own rôle than Flecker. In a recent book[1] Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie, working out his theory of poetic inspiration, maintained that " it is as experience—imaginative experience—that poetry begins " ; and his illustration of the process, from four dissimilar poets, Drummond of Hawthornden, Herrick, Wordsworth, and Walt Whitman, shows that by " experience " he means an almost unanalysable combination of perception with intellectual and emotional activity ; a complex presentment of fact, if one may use so commonplace and ambiguous a word, which becomes poetry as the poet contrives to express it in human language.

This " experience," so difficult to describe intelligibly that Mr. Abercrombie prefers to suggest it by illustrations rather than by direct definition, is perhaps the most ultimate reality man can reach. Anyhow, so he argues, it is the ground of poetry. If he be right in this, we at once see the cause of the dissatisfaction that competent critics always feel with every kind of manufactured, and mechanically " occasional " verse. This " experience," this percipient, intellectualised and emotionalised, non-physical vision is unmistakable in Flecker's work. Carefully wrought as are his prose and verse, underneath there is always this " primitive unquestioned instant value," this " final unity, focussing all its glowing variety into a single incandescence," of which Mr. Abercrombie writes. It is just this sense of something actually passed through, this quick intuition, which distinguishes Flecker's work from that of so many of his contemporaries.

Fort's poetry, undoubtedly, rests on this same kind of " experience," which as Mr. Abercrombie urges, is the essence of all true poetry. But Fort, with his philosophic bent, analyses himself and his work, and insists rather more on his own sheerly creative function.

But Fort is not of that arrogant temper which disclaims its debts. When he has made his daring claim, in *Vivre en Dieu*, to be a veritable creator, in the same breath, he declares that the

[1] *The Theory of Poetry.*

"light" is eternal, at best, he re-creates it; and vehemently declares—

> "Je haïs les sages; non les inspirés du feu."

All who remember Pascal's *Amulet* will realise, as they read the next lines—

> "Toute l'âme du Christ et tout son cœur sublime,
> saint Jean, sainte Thérèse, et Pascal les
> dominent,"—

that these "fire-inspired men," are, like Pascal, mystics, intuitively aware of reality. Fort's whole philosophy is subjective :—

> "Créer, rêver sont même chose,"

he declares, as he looks out upon the phenomenal world, and once more asks the old questions—whence is it? what is it made of? what underlies it? His answer is :—

> "Rêve, Ame, Feu céleste, ardente trinité, vous
> me faites divin puisque vous m'habitez. Rêve,
> principe universel et seul vrai dieu, Feu, pre-
> mier-né du Rêve, Ame-Esprit, fils du Feu!"

In the Dream-world of the Supreme Dreamer, Fort wanders as a child strays at his own will in his father's demesne: and, like a child, he searches with eager, alert senses :—

> "Je voudrais de mes doigts caresser la nature, comme un
> bel instrument qui réponde à mon rêve."

He was happier than Flecker in this, that he never lost the key of the enchanted house, and seldom, if ever, strayed beyond the barriers, to some outside, uncaring, dully unresponsive world.

It will be remembered that Flecker made Fort's acquaintance in volumes borrowed from the General Library at Leysin. Later on, he would seem to have used mainly the admirable *Choix de Ballades françaises* (selected by Fort himself and published by Figuière): at any rate that is the edition he specially recommended in his Essay, *Paul Fort, Prince of Poets*,[1] in which he observed that Fort "is hardly more known to the general public than was the

[1] The Essay is reprinted in *Collected Prose*. This title, applied to Fort, refers to Mistral's exclamation. He, "la grande Cigale du Midi," being asked for advice in the election of "le Prince des Poètes," rejoined, "Je vote pour Paul Fort, la Cigale du Nord."

classical Moréas, or, to take an English example, that fine poet, Mr. de la Mare."

Flecker wrote that ten years ago. It may be doubted if Fort is better known in England than he was in 1913.

Extracts only from *Vivre en Dieu* were included in the *Choix de Ballades*, and since Flecker described them as "a direct but still amusing attempt to state and arrange his views on God and the world," he may seem to have missed Fort's meaning. In "hating philosophy" during his undergraduate days, he was shutting his eyes to one great side of human life, and was losing an inspiration which the few years of his life hardly allowed him to capture later. It is wholly in accordance with his objective mind, therefore, that he should have asserted of Fort that "it is by his lyrics he will be remembered."

Naturally, too, with his own peculiar bent, he dwelt on Fort's exuberant gaiety and imagination, "giving the impression that though the world is deadly serious, it is still disreputably young." He emphasised Fort's understanding of the simplest yet most vital elements in life—precisely those for which he himself so greatly cared—

> "the soil, the sun, the rain, the labours, sorrows and songs of the people;"

his appreciation, too, of the mediæval world, his Rabelaisian wit, shown so finely in *Louis XI*—though the subtler *Louis XI, Curieux Homme* was not written till after Flecker's death.

Like Flecker, Henri de Regnier appreciated Fort's exuberance:—

> "Il y a là, il faut le dire, une abondance singulière et une vitalité puissante, toute la plantureuse confusion d'un esprit qui se cherche et s'exerce dans tous les sens, à travers les zigzags de toutes ses fantaisies, obéissant à des pensées disparates, à des intuitions subites, aux soubresauts d'une verve capricieuse, à tout ce que l'instant fait passer d'émotions, d'images et de rythmes en une âme extraordinairement vibrante et attentive, prompte à les saisir au passage et à en fixer la nuance, la forme ou le mouvement."[1]

It is worth while to insist on this quality in Fort's poetry, because, though it may not lend itself to an exact estimate, the effect of such abounding almost extravagant vitality on Flecker, in his particular physical condition, must have been considerable.

It is no exaggeration to say that in extent of range, in astonishing

[1] *Le Mercure de France*, May, 1897.

versatility, Paul Fort stands unrivalled in these opening years of the twentieth century. In the matter of sheer bulk, over thirty volumes stand in his name. But mere bulk fades into unimportance by the side of his infinite variety. Classic odes and idylls; popular "chanteys"; great and glorious hymns to Nature; the sly and whimsical presentations of Louis XI; exquisite lyrics like *Philomèle;* poignant ballads; songs all tingling and streaming with the sea's freshness; escapades into what Flecker might, indeed, have called "Hell-literature," like his terrible *Le Roi du Nord*, or *Marlowe et Shakespeare;* that grisly fantasy *La Mort en Visite;* or the wistful, haunting *Le Chat borgne*, or the mischievous *La Grenouille Bleue*, which might almost make Mr. de la Mare envious, all these, and a thousand more, make up an ever new, fascinating, alluring world.

Small wonder that Flecker, chained to a bed of desolating sickness, found a way of escape in these enchanted volumes.

No one studying Fort's many volumes could deny that his range of interests is immeasurably wider than Flecker's, whose outlook after all was anything but narrow. Certainly, too, Fort's cast of mind was more philosophic than Flecker's. The real bond between them, then, was pure *joie de vivre*, unquenchable enjoyment of the world's contents and meaning: and this was strengthened by the rare lyrical talent which both possessed. Beyond that, differences began to show: Fort often tended towards pure philosphy, Flecker to its more objective manifestation, drama. Wholly in keeping with the intellectual difference between them is the variety in form of their verse. While Flecker wrought and polished his poetry on traditional lines, Fort was not only a *vers-libriſt*, but the moulder, as Pierre Loüys declared at the outset, of "un style intermédiaire entre la prose et le vers français, un style complet qui semble unir les qualités contraires de ses deux aînés."

Flecker frankly regretted Fort's form: "I believe," so he wrote, "that if he were to publish his shorter lyrics printed in the old established way, they would be received with immense enthusiasm, not only by a literary clique, but by the whole French nation."

There spoke the true Flecker. He detested cliques: poetry, in his eyes, was for the world, not for a coterie. More even than cliques, he detested formlessness, and somehow he failed to perceive the possibilities dormant in Fort's elasticity of rhythm, depending, not a little, on different handling of mute syllables.

Like other people, to some of his personal friends Flecker wrote vehemently; to some only, for he had always, as has been already observed, a nice *flair* for suiting himself to his audience. Poetry, of course, was as good a subject for vehemence as any other. So,

writing to Mr. Goldring, he spoke of poets who had written "God-forsaken, formless muck." He criticised himself with equal vigour: "I've turfed out the rot," he declared; and again, more impetuously still, "I managed to hoof out all sorts of godless rot."

These observations may be violent and inelegant, but they show that whether he was writing colloquially, or whether with scrupulous taste he was composing the *Preface* to *Samarkand*, his feeling was one and the same, a horror of the amorphous, of the imperfect. Mr. Goldring did him no more than justice when he declared "that in an age of anarchy in verse he took the trouble to become a master of technique: in an age of formlessness, he upheld the finest traditions of form."

But as, through his prejudice against philosophy, he fell a little short of probing Fort's system of thought, so, even more remarkably still, since he was so faultless a master of language and prosody, he mistook Fort's unique rhythm for formlessness.

It must surely be admitted further, that Fort outstripped Flecker in vision, whatever might have been the case had the latter lived longer. Fort's *Hymnes*, his *Vivre en Dieu* are vaster in sweep, swifter, more unfaltering in flight than anything Flecker actually produced, even in *Hassan*. Fort lived more persistently among forces at once vast and subtle.

Standing alone, on a mountain-top at night, he cries suddenly—

> "En exil dans la nuit d'étoiles, en exil! Et j'écoutais frémir les
> ailes de la nuit."

As again he stands alone in the midst of rare natural beauty, he sees wonderful things happening—

> "l'air froid de l'aurore aiguiser sa douleur,"

or, as in this beautiful picture—

> "tu verras au ciel un astre s'émouvoir, cet astre lentement, plus lentement partir, hésiter, et parfois verser, tremblant ciboire,
> son sang réparateur à la terre martyre."

Like Vaughan and Traherne, Fort loses himself in the beauty of the universe—

> "La terre et le soleil en moi sont en cadence, et toute la nature est entrée dans mon cœur."

Then he can stand outside it all, spectator-wise, as he calls to the surging waves—

> "Dans les hautes marées montez, flots éternels, montez

éperdument jusqu'aux espaces pâles où la mer du Chaos, sur les plages du
ciel, a deposé le sel infini des étoiles."

What a picture—the midnight sky, strewn with the glistening salt of innumerable stars.

Like Kant, Fort was overwhelmed by the beauty of the star-strewn sky. In the picture, in *Le Roman de Louis XI*, of Paris, at night, we find this vision :—

"Il venait des étoiles comme un odeur de miel, et dans le ciel doré volaient des astres bleus, et c'étaient, les étoiles comme un essaim d'abeilles, ailes bleus adorantes autour d'un lys doré."

When he comes down again to earth, his vigilant eye lets nothing of the vast panorama escape. There is, for example, his Hymn to the great Corn-lands of France, those leagues on leagues of glaucous, billowing greenness, splashed with flaring poppies and the blue of cornflowers and spiry campanulas. Or there is his Hymn to the Trees in Autumn, when he personifies the Season into the great Metal-worker and Burnisher—

"J'ai compris quel subtil orfèvre était l'automne, lorsque, ses vents brillants entre ses doigts vermeils, il râpe la feuillée et délivre l'or jaune qu'un été généreux insinuait en elle."

It is idle to pretend that Flecker drew such immense pictures : rather he excelled in vignettes :—

Home to my home come they who fight,
Who fight but not to win :
Without, my tent is black as night,
And red as fire within :

or :—

Beyond the sea are towns with towers, carved with lions and lily flowers,
And not a soul in all those lonely streets to while away the hours ;

or, once again—

Ah, misty woodland, down whose deep
And twilight paths I love to stroll
To meadows quieter than sleep
And pools more secret than the soul !

These are the pictures which came naturally to him, for he had an alert eye for detail, for the salient facts, whether of sight, sound or smell, which make the individuality of an elect moment—

windy odours light as thistledown
Breathe from the lavdanon and lavender—

lavdanon, the Syrian rock-rose, which he loved for its "queer little scent." Yet among his very latest poems there are two which suggest that longer life might have let him wander into far and vaster ways.

O Thoughts, Thoughts, Thoughts,—Fire-angel-birds relentless.

Surely there, in *The Pensive Prisoner*, surely a new note sounds through his verse. And once more, where else has he made so tremendous a picture as in *Hexameters?*—

Blue burning and gold, the hollow of Chaos adorning,
Shine, happy Dome of th' Air, on Sea thy Sister, on ancient
Plains, on sharp snowbeard mountains, on silvery waters,
On knotted, eld-mossed trees, on roses starry with April—
But most shine upon one lying tormented, a dreamer,
Thy lover.
. . . . . .
Send a volley straight through to the heart of this desolation,
And burning, blasting with a shaft of thunderous azure,
Break the ebon soldiers, restore his realm to the dreamer.

Deep in his soul, from first to last, was a terror of the unfamiliar. In that very late poem *The True Paradise*, he uttered his last petition for *home*—

Grant me earth's treats in Paradise to find.
. . . . . .
So I, and all my friends, still young, still wise,
Will shout along thy streets—"O Paradise!"
But if prepared for me new Mansions are,
Chill and unknown, in some bright windy Star,
Mid strange-shaped Souls from all the Planets seven,
Lord, I fear deep, and would not go to Heaven.
Rather in feather-mist I'd fade away
Like the Dawn-writing of an April day.

Did not another poet, obsessed with the Dread of Height, cry—

Pass the crystalline sea, the Lampads seven;—
Look for me in the nurseries of Heaven,

and will Christianity, the religion which supremely sanctified the pieties of Home, blame Flecker or Francis Thompson, for a child-like mood not wholly grasping, yet, that—

All which thy child's mistake
Fancies is lost, I have stored for thee at home?

Even if *The Pensive Prisoner* and *Hexameters* owe something to Flecker's appreciation of Fort, still very early in his career, he could occasionally see a far-stretching vision; there are these lines from his first published volume, for example:—

Between the pedestals of Night and Morning,
Stands the great sentry on the Bridge of Fire.
. . . . . .
The wheels of Time are turning, turning, turning,
The slow stream channels deep and doth not tire.

In one respect Fort and Flecker undoubtedly differ. Flecker's white-lighting wit is a totally different quality from the astounding humour of Fort, now Gargantuan, filling the whole scene with din and confusion, now sinuous, scarcely to be traced by the alertest mind, so subtle is it. It is indeed unthinkable that any other contemporary poet could have written *Le Roman de Louis XI*, and *Louis XI, Curieux Homme*. Flecker's enjoyment of them, however, must have been beyond all telling.

Fort's influence on Flecker must certainly not be unduly pressed. After all, the commerce between two minds is a very subtle thing, and is but clumsily apprehended by the stickler for pure originality and by the man obsessed by the possibilities of plagiarism.

That there were fundamental affinities between the two poets can hardly be denied. *Les Idylles Antiques*, for instance, which, in spite of their untraditional form, are, as Flecker said, alive "with all those suggestive, whispering little gods who have haunted Christian Europe far more tenaciously than the white Olympians," are of the same spirit as not a few of Flecker's poems.

Then, to both poets, the senses were of prime importance: and, which is a more singular gift, both gained descriptive power through blending the senses.

"Epousez-vous, mes sens, toucher, regard, ouïe,"

said Fort; and from those espousals wonderful pictures sprang:—

Je vois la plaine au loin vibrante comme un son—
La terre, je la vois, la terre je l'entends, la terre est sous mes yeux et vit dans mon oreille,
Je voudrais de mes doigts caresser la nature.

Though possibly these mingled sense-impressions occur more frequently in Flecker's later poems, still they were native to him, his own, and nowise borrowed. He wrote *Lucretia* when he was

twenty, quite eight years before he made acquaintance with Fort's work. In that, these lines occur :—

It was evening :
We wandered shorewards, mid the ocean of air
That glassed the gliding Nereids of the Pole.
Immeasurable moonlight kissed the brow
Of the white sea whose ripples swayed to greet
Our heart's unnumbered laughter. Strongeſt sleep
So held the life of earth that dimly we heard
Time's fatal pulse through the dark reverberated.

In these not altogether faultless lines, the blending of the senses is apparent. Yet, of course, they act singly at times. The delicacy of Fort's sense of hearing is indeed infinitely attenuated, as in this verse from *Coxcomb* :—

" J'entends les étoiles traîner le silence comme une voile immense au ras des meules."

With both poets, vision was, on the whole, the dominant sense : vision in which colour predominated over form. In both, if we take Flecker's later, maturer work the same colours constantly recur ; gold, silver, blue, red. Who can forget the radiancy of *Saadabad ?*—

Down the Horn, Conſtantinople fades and flashes in the blue,
Rose of cities, dropping with the heavy summer's burning dew,
Fading now as falls the Orient evening round the sky and you,
Fading into red and silver as we row to Saadabad :

or Fort's panorama of *Dawn ?*—

" L'aube a roulé ses roues de glace dans l'horizon. La terre se découvre en gammes de jour pâle. Un mont reflète, humide, les dernières étoiles, et les animaux bleus boivent l'herbe d'argent.

Aurore, ta rosée vient s'étoiler sur l'herbe et courir dans les sillons comme un jeune sang. . . .

La lumière tombait, en arpèges dorés, des myſtiques rayons que berçait l'air sonore. Aux pics dorés des monts, aux vagues d'or des près, aux plis d'or des forêts, la lumière chantait ! "

Though both cared for metallic colours, Fort differed in preferring the sombrer hues, the colours of twilight, the umbred and nacred shades. For some ſtrange reason, he omitted from his own

selection—the *Choix de Ballades*—his delicately exquisite *Intermezzo*, dedicated to his wife :—

> " Ton coude appuyé sur les roses mourantes dont nous couvrîmes, au jour, le banc choisi, et ton front plus pâle à ton main plus blanche, tes yeux d'argent noir plus clairs dans la nuit.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Tes beaux yeux d'argent noir et de mer azurée ! "
>
> "Le vent couvre de roses ton ombre sur le gravier, les phalènes se brûlent aux feux de ton collier, la lune met sa couronne de perles endormies sur tes cheveux nocturnes et sur ton front qui luit.
>
> En vain, tu veux chasser le rêve, ô mon amour. Le rêve est dans ta vie : en vain tu te dérobes. Comme ton ombre suit ta robe de velours, le souvenir du rêve suivra le rêve encore.
>
> Ton ombre se retire : elle entraîne les roses.
>
> Tu chasses les phalènes : elles suivent ton collier. La lune met sa couronne de perles endormies sur tes cheveux qui volent et sur ton front qui fuit."

In *Saadabad* Flecker sang of sunset-glow : and in *Intermezzo* Fort imprisoned the silvered, shadowed night.

Flecker perceived the *nuances* of thought and conduct as alertly as he seized on those of colour and atmosphere. His diatribes against message-mongering proclaim him an artist who knew that æsthetics and ethics gain nothing either by being confounded together, or by being antagonised. He was not an exact textual scholar, nor, in the most precise sense of the word, was he a philosopher. But he could and did think : and his sharpness of mental edge sorted well with his joy in the clarity of physical light.

Had he lived even another ten years, his powers must have matured vastly. It is possible, so enthusiastic was he about Paul Fort's art, that he might have deepened and widened on the philosophic side. No one who reads *Hassan* for its own sake, and without ulterior motive, can fail to perceive how great a step onward it was. It was not influenced in any way by Fort : it was finished too soon for that.

Its construction may not be faultless : but unless they had been told that it had taken other forms before finally assuming its present one, it is most unlikely that the newspaper critics would ever have dreamed of such a thing.

It has perhaps been judged too exclusively by one particular stage presentation of it. Flecker would not have objected to a stage version. He once wrote to a manager in whose hands it then was, "Please never think that I want to institute a sort of Literature and Drama quarrel! For me every correction that makes the play more actable makes it better literature."

He was exceedingly anxious to have *Hassan* staged. Always he had some tendency to over-adapt himself to the person he was dealing with. Removed from those two subtle temptations, he might have phrased this admission more precisely. The meaning turns on the word "actable." If it refers to acting which will appeal to people of uncritical minds and spectacular tastes then, correction, designed to gratify them, may involve irreparable damage to "literature."

As *Hassan* was staged, the sacrifice of significance to stage effects was obvious. In the first place, it was overborne with pictorial splendour, with noise, glare, and bustle.

Writing on "The Reform of the Theatre," W. B. Yeats has recently suggested that: "Greek acting was great because it did all but everything with the voice: and modern acting may be great when it does everything with voice and movement. But an art which smothers these things with bad painting, with innumerable garish colours, with continual restless mimicries of the surface of life, is an art of fading humanity, a decaying art."[1]

It may be argued that the painting was not bad, and that garish colours befit Eastern drama; yet it is possible to have too much of not-bad painting. Anyhow, to the minds of not a few, the original stage-setting of *Hassan*—a play before all else poetic in its main conception and in its exquisitely chosen language—was far too overwhelmingly dominant. The play needed first and last and all through superb acting; it did not really need an insistent *mise-en-scène*. Whether actors exist among us who could render this terror, wit, and subtlety, these complex and rare human purposes, which recall Webster and nothing else upon the English stage since his time, is a question which some might find difficult to answer. But if they do not, their place cannot be filled by scenery; not even by the camels, which it must be admitted Flecker desired, and which—happily, considering the crowded condition of the stage—were not forthcoming.

It is an irony, indeed, that the one play of recent years which issued from a vividly and intensely original mind, deliberately cultivated, directed, and curbed, should have fallen into the restless

[1] *Plays and Controversies*, p. 49.

setting of an art which, aware perhaps of its own uncertainty and chaos, has sought refuge in vehemence and crudity.

Then, secondly, the acting-edition was mercilessly mutilated. Granted that *Hassan* was a little long for impatient tastes, there were two scenes which should not have been sacrificed to any considerations whatever, simply because they were vital to the play's main theme. There was one scene, moreover, which contributed little to the fundamental purpose. The first of the two essential scenes is the first one of the fourth Act, where Hassan and Ishak meet outside Rafi's cell. Without this, their encounter after the torture, and still more, their sudden departure on the *Golden Journey*—

"For lust of knowing what should not be known"

hangs in the air, unaccounted for. The second essential scene is the garden part of the first scene of the fifth Act. In the stage rendering, the first of these scenes disappeared altogether, and the second was reduced to a scanty and unimpressive shred.

The scene which, if it were necessary to excise something, could have been spared, or at any rate pared, is that between Hassan and the four girl-slaves, a superfluous portion of a necessary scene. But it is highly spectacular, affording obvious scope for the costumier and the dancing master; so it was not only retained, but the very utmost was made of it.

The play as it left Flecker's hands, as it was published in book-form, hung together, well-balanced, and worked up to a sufficiently plain meaning; in that version, Alder, Juniper, and the rest fell into their right place. Cut as it was, the meaning was obscured, and, for some people, apparently lost.

The play's drift is intellectual, emotional, spiritual: but its fate was to appear to an age given over, at any rate superficially, to crude materialism. Flecker loathed the whole business of message-mongering. But because he would not foist a meaning on men's minds, it did not follow that his work was meaningless; only that its form was not the twelve-inch letters of a popular poster. Beneath the horror and terror and lacerating wit is the secret beauty which Ishak sought, beauty older than the world and greater than all its evil. The theme of the play is the struggle between idealism and cruel materialism refined beyond belief by artistry. Rafi and Pervaneh, the lower idealism, go down indeed before Haroun: but Ishak and Hassan, idealists who, in the last resort, will strip off every encumbrance and give all for All, start, without a backward glance, upon the great Adventure, and so escape both from Haroun's blandishments and from his tortures.

The first staging of a play, so alien to all English traditions since

early Jacobean days, is a task of overwhelming difficulty. Much time and many attempts may conceivably be consumed before *Hassan* is seen as it really is.

Anyhow, those who read it will perceive that here is Flecker's maturest work. The "Persian Dawn" song is the sublimated essence of the beauty to which through many previous efforts he had been surely working up. Hassan's speeches, too, strike a deeper note than any sounded save in his very latest poems :—

> "At evening when God flings roses through the sky, call me then to some calm pavilion, and let us hear Ishak play, and let us hear Ishak sing, till you forget you are Lord of all the World, and I forget that I am a base-born tradesman: till we discover the speech of things that have no life, and know what the clods of earth are saying to the roots of the garden trees."

There is in Sir Richard Burton's *Kasîdah* a couplet which bears some faint resemblance to one of Ishak's most startling speeches :—

And still the Weaver plies his loom, whose warp and woof is wretched Man,
Weaving th' unpatterned dark design, so dark we doubt it owns a plan.

That, perhaps, is a notable example of Burton's partial subjection to the peculiar philosophic doubt of his age. But with the same subject what a different effect Flecker has wrought :—

> "Have you not seen the designer of carpets, O Hassan of Bagdad, put here the blue and here the gold, here the orange and here the green? So have I seen the Caliph take the life of some helpless man—who was contented in his little house and garden, enjoying the blue of happy days—and colour his life with the purple of power, and streak it with the crimson of lust: then whelm it all in the gloom-greys of abasement, touched with the glaring reds of pain, and edge the whole with the black border of annihilation. . . .
>
> Agony is a fine colour, and he delights therein as a painter in vermilion new brought from Kurdistan."

Instead of Burton's philosophic, speculative standpoint, we have this objective, detailed, vivid description of what a bystander saw, and shuddered at.

The accusation has been launched that Flecker delighted in cruelty and rioted in the fantastic. If there were any faint ground for it, for instance in *Taoping*, or in an incident in *Mansur*, surely this speech of Ishak, throbbing with human pity and understanding,

most curiously and clear-sightedly blent, would negative it. Perhaps the notion that he took an unwholesome delight in pain for its own sake, sprang from some bluntness of perception in his accusers.

He felt pain of all kinds, physical, mental, spiritual, with a sharpness blessedly denied to the bulk of mankind. But also he responded to all impressions spectator-wise, as a born artist must. A passage in *The Public as Art Critic*, where he is describing the functions of a "critic of poetry" indicates his own standpoint too :—

> "He will know that art is divided not into decadent and healthy, classic and romantic, but into the two mighty divisions of Good and Bad, and that these divisions alone hold true. One great dogma alone he must hold—that human life is passionately interesting in all its forms, that over the filthiest by-ways the sky of night must stretch its flowery mantle of stars."

He did not delight in Haroun's atrocious refinements of cruelty in any other sense but that.

Flecker's attitude of intense sensibility and artistic detachment is not very common perhaps : when it occurs, and its natural results become patent, the practical English onlooker is not improbably bewildered. Not everyone, however, who brought the accusation can find shelter so respectably as the plain, unimaginative man is entitled to do.

With all his artistry and detachment, it seems as if here and there, Flecker expressed himself through Ishak. For example, after the Caliph has escaped from Rafi's Palace, he meets Ishak and inquires:—

> "Why did you abandon me, Ishak, and flee into the night ? I do not know if I shall forgive you."
> "I was weary of you, Haroun-ar-Raschid,"

the poet tersely replies. Perhaps that is an impossible episode in an Eastern Court : but it throws light on Flecker. There, in a few words, this poet and dreamer, who had knocked, gaining so little response, on the curtained door of his countrymen's intelligence, arraigned the stupid material force against which idealism seems doomed to dash itself.

After all, his particular gifts were not nicely adapted to an era in which what men call success seems to depend, so often, on influence or impudence.

Still more, perhaps, does Flecker himself speak in that summary of man's struggle into peace, which is folded up, like a shut flower, in Ishak's promise concerning Hassan's cherished, and still unpolluted carpet :—

"I will bring it you. You shall stretch it out upon the desert when you say your evening prayer, and it shall be a little meadow in the waste of sand."

These things may or may not have come across the footlights through the glare and the blare. But they are an integral part of human life, and of *Hassan* as Flecker left it for the world to comprehend or disown. It is difficult to see how anyone could remain indifferent to it save from laziness or invincible stupidity, for it is one of the most subtle and crushing indictments of material ease and opulent cruelty ever written in the English tongue. It is Flecker's last appeal to the world to rate intellect, spirit, beauty, truth above Power, however completely it may be sublimated, or covered by the veneer of artistic refinement.

Ishak and Hassan are the real soul of the play, not Rafi and Pervaneh. All four are idealists, specially in Bagdad: but the two former represent the uncalculating, unlimited, unrepentant Idealism which comes through. Nothing can finally break them. The first note is struck when Hassan, mocked by Selim, rejoins—

"Indeed, I think I am a fool. It is the affliction of Allah"—

which is just the truth which S. Paul presented to the surprised Corinthians when he reminded them that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men." This thesis is slowly worked out through the dazzling wit and soul-shaking horror.

Twice, Idealism nearly succeeds in disturbing Haroun's settled materialism, once when he shrinks back from executing Ishak, and once when Hassan reminds him of the nature and function of poetry.

But Flecker was not trifling with the world's great forces; rather, with white and scathing wit he was setting them against a background of crimson and black. He knew the grip in which materialism holds its followers, and the last ghastly speech of Haroun is his inevitable climax.

But the end of Ishak and Hassan is peace, scarred and struggle-stained it may be, but peace:—

Sweet to ride forth at evening from the wells,
When shadows pass gigantic on the sand,
And softly through the silence beat the bells
Along the Golden Road to Samarkand.

We travel not for trafficking alone;
By hotter winds our fiery hearts are fanned:
For lust of knowing what should not be known,
We take the Golden Road to Samarkand.

The advance in Flecker's art, it will be seen, is all in the direction of fuller apprehension, keener insight, deeper human feeling, along the far-reaching path where Paul Fort was marching ahead. In another ten years, not influenced by so much as remaining in touch with Fort, Flecker would have gone much further: his was a mind which never stood still.

All through the latter years of his short life, in spite of his wide acquaintance with poets of many ancient and modern tongues, it was very largely among a few of the later Frenchmen that he found refreshment and impulse. Writing of living or recently dead French authors, he said in his essay on Paul Fort:—

> "there is somehow an undoubted pleasure in constructing a hierarchy, in picturing modern French poetry to oneself as being led by two great chiefs, Henri de Régnier and Paul Fort—two men of genius, strikingly dissimilar to each other. . . . Unfortunately, this is no very high compliment; for if we count Verhaeren as a Belgian . . . there is very little left in modern French poetry, since the untimely deaths of Samain and Moréas, which calls for more than respect, outside the work of these two men of genius."

That passage indicates Flecker's choice among the French moderns. It seems somewhat strange that he should have neglected Paul Claudel, and given little thought to Claude Farrère. It is easy to see why he should not greatly have cared for Claudel's *Tête d'Or*—whose beauty is somewhat veiled in chaos—for *La Jeune Fille Violaine*, in its first or second version, or even for *L'Otage* which seems, of them all, the nearest to his own standpoint perhaps. But it is altogether incredible that, if he ever met it, he did not appreciate the cameos of Far Eastern beauty which fill *Connaissance de l'Est: Le Cocotier* for example, or, alight and tense with emotion, the exquisite *Splendeur de la Lune*.

Nor if he knew it, could he, one would suppose, fail to appreciate Farrère's Constantinople romance, *L'homme qui assassina:* while, for he must be remembered not only as a poet but as a maker of prose too, he himself might have written those tragic sentences in the first story of *Fumée d'Opium*:—

> "Mais Yu-Tcheng-Hoa l'Exquise s'est effacée pour jamais dans la brume du soleil levant. Et dans les yeux métalliques du Fumeur, qui de sa vie n'a ri ni pleuré, des larmes naissent, très amères."

Once or twice only did he mention Farrère's name, in connexion with *Bataille*, which, he said, suggested *The Painter's Mistress*.

It must not be forgotten that some of the work included in M. de la Vaissière's *Anthologie Poétique du XX^e Siècle* was available

when Flecker was still at the height of his powers. In fact, once he wrote of " the minor poets of the Futurist School," of " the Unanimists and the rest." M. de la Vaissière, in his introductory essay to this *Anthologie*, agreed with Flecker about the " class-listing " of poets. He wrote :—

> " Je ne crois point, par ailleurs, que l'on puisse établir une hiérarchie entre les poètes, quand ce sont de vrais poètes . . . chacun d'eux tend vers sa perfection qui n'est pas celle du voisin."

Flecker, though he admitted the pleasure, laughed at the practice : he began his sentence with the words " The ranking of poets is a tedious and rather childish pastime."

But Flecker, in face of much of the work, thus collected by M. de la Vaissière, depreciated most of modern French poetry, in this last essay of his. Yet, there it was, an immense, widely-spread poetic activity, broken into, of course, but nowise stopped by the war ; and it culminated in these various groups—hardly schools—of French poets, who followed the *Parnassiens* and *Symbolistes*, all those whose class-names at any rate are familiar, *humanistes*, *naturistes*, *mallarmistes*, *exotistes*, *unanimistes*, *fantaisistes* and the rest, whom, after pages of illuminating criticism, M. de la Vaissière so cleverly subsumes, under the two main tendencies which he declares to have ever been the ruling forces of French poetic genius :—

> " Enfin, ce ' temps présent,' où s'entremêlent confusément une réaction vigoureuse dans le sens traditionnel, purement français, et des aspirations vers un idéal européen. Force dionysienne, force apollinienne, toujours."

It is rather surprising that, in the face of all that fermenting activity—not, of course, destined to flower fully till the war was over, but already manifestly at work—Flecker could write that " there is very little left in modern French poetry since the untimely deaths of Samain and Moréas, which calls for more than respect, outside the work of those two men of genius."

Probably, his usual readiness to investigate and accept new ideas was overborne, by his equally conspicuous quality, the capacity to be absorbed, for a time, wholly in one interest ; and so his abounding enthusiasm for Paul Fort, shut his eyes to the maturing gifts of other men, whose great claims Flecker must have admitted had he lived longer. Perhaps, too, he was forgetting, in his enthusiasm, that " chacun d'eux tend vers sa perfection, qui n'est pas celle du voisin."

The point need not be laboured. A single example will suffice. Among all these young poets, there is one, *fantaisiste*, Tristan Klingsor, whose genius seems particularly likely to have attracted

Flecker. While sharing Flecker's regard for tradition, Klingsor, in common with his "group," differed from him in not wholly banning *vers libres*. Perhaps the *fantaisistes* are liaison poets between the strict traditionalists and the extreme *vers libristes*. They vary the length of the lines, but they retain rhythm and assonance, and sometimes rime.

The following poem—which surely must have won Flecker's admiration, what a translation he might have made of it!—Klingsor published in 1903, that is while Flecker was at Oxford:—

Je m'assieds à ma table de bois de rose
Devant la feuille blanche de papier
Et je repose
Mon menton dans ma main ployée.

Je voudrais écrire pour celle que j'adore
Des poèmes d'amour beaux comme ceux d'Hafiz,
Mais mes pensées s'envolent au dehors,
Vers sa maison comme des feuilles sur la brise.

Un rossignol sans que je le voie
Chante dans le soir d'été;
Je me figure que c'est sa douce voix
Et je me mets à la fenêtre pour écouter.

Et comme la chanson s'achève,
Je reviens à ma table et je m'asseois:
Maintenant les mots d'amour me montent aux lèvres.
Et ma main court sur le papier de soie.

If what has been said here is true, it is obvious that Flecker had little, if any, part in that kind of "Georgian" poetry, of which Mr. Harold Monro's *Everything*, and Mr. Osbert Sitwell's *Church Parade* are extreme examples, and which can hardly escape the charge of cataloguing indiscriminately all the phenomena about the poet. The process may justly be called indiscriminate, because it throws no light on, brings out no meaning in, and suggests no difference among all these objects, which, treated so, are nearly as dull as the items in a housewife's shopping list of groceries. No one wishes to deny the significance of environment: the idea remains as one of the most tiresome and overworked of platitudes. But Flecker conveyed surroundings without chattering about it: he could seize a charmed moment and fix it in a setting of fit words. *The Painter's Mistress* is an instance. There, we gather the meaning without any list of outside values. Beyond all else, individuality was his distinguishing mark. He is not only singular in his generation, but in our Literature. It is no question of absolute

or relative greatness, no problem of hierarchies. Flecker's distinction is that he wrote beautiful verse, delicately conceived, highly wrought, " chryselephantine " verse which is not likely ever to be mistaken by any practised reader for any other poet's work.

As one goes in memory through the achievements of his contemporaries, it is often possible—if Mr. de la Mare and the Anglo-Irishmen are omitted—to forget who wrote which poem; and it is seldom impossible to maintain that a given poem could not conceivably have been written by any one of several living poets. It would be hard, indeed, to think that anyone but Flecker could have written *Tenebris Interlucentem*, *Taoping*, *Gates of Damascus*, *Epithalamion*, *Brumana*, *The Old Ships*, *Narcissus*, or *Stillness*. Though in this choice among his poems there is variety, yet each one is essentially, the offspring of his peculiar vision and genius. His place among English poets will not be with the voluminous: but the " nation of shopkeepers," with its usual aptitude for accommodation and unexpected insight, has ever acclaimed poets whose reputation rested on the slenderest output: if not, why do we cherish the names, for example, of Thomas Gray and mad Kit Smart?

Though many of his contemporaries have written far more than Flecker did, we may confidently expect that his poems will remain when louder-voiced and bulkier persons have slipped down into the region of forgotten or lost values.

No one of his actual material volumes—*The Golden Journey*, *The Collected Poems*, *Old Ships*, or *Hassan* is " an absolutely dead thing." There gleams on the very printed pages some quality of living light and vigorous grace. Open a volume, and the words themselves lie on the paper with a life, indescribable, perhaps, but unmistakably there. It is like a glancing impression of streams of sunlit water, of transparent, many-hued light. Or, to use again the word which perhaps fits it best, it is chryselephantine work, inlaid ivory and gold.

Intensity of personality is, perhaps, the secret; not greatness nor smallness nor any such thing, but sheer intensity. As the generations pass, here and there a poet arises whose personal, inmost self, refuses as it were to pass from the living, coloured life of men.

As Walt Whitman, crossing Brooklyn Ferry, cried aloud—

> *It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not,*
> *I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence,*
> *Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt,*
> *Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd—*

so Flecker appealed To a Poet a Thousand Years hence—

I who am dead a thousand years,
And wrote this sweet archaic song,
Send you my words for messengers
The way I shall not pass along.

. . . . . .

O friend unseen, unborn, unknown,
Student of our sweet English tongue,
Read out my words at night, alone :
I was a poet, I was young.

Since I can never see your face,
And never shake you by the hand,
I send my soul through time and space
To greet you. You will understand.

And this unquenchable spiritual intensity lies like light upon their pages. Flecker was the one man of his generation who treated literature, not only seriously—others did that or we should be in a bad way—but as a matter of super-eminent importance, to which, if necessary, other very valuable considerations must be sacrificed. In this, he was nearer to modern French and Anglo-Irish *literati* than to his own English contemporaries. He saw clearly what the majority of his compatriots perceive confusedly or not at all, that production of goods for the body and of those for the spirit of man are two totally different things : that the one is or may be subject to economic laws, but that the other certainly is not. While we retain our bodies, material things we all must have. With spiritual and intellectual goods many contentedly dispense. Those, however, who do wish for spiritual and intellectual things must realise that these have inexhaustible worth which cannot, however, be measured by a banker, nor can a merchant regard them as directly productive in the economic sense. They must be a charge on material production : they are necessary luxuries, an idea not so familiar to some people as might be wished. Flecker perceived this fundamental, most important fact. He knew, he could not help knowing, that in " creating beauty," he was not necessarily feeding and clothing himself, for non-material achievement cannot, at its mere will, command hard cash.

This idea goes back at least as far as Classic Greece. The Greeks have, not seldom, been reviled as supporters of slavery, because they relieved their " Guardians " from servile toil, thereby necessarily imposing it on certain other people. Leaving on one side the question whether one would rather have been a " slave " in Athens, or a sweated artisan in a modern slum, the fact remains,

and seems likely to remain, that there is not, and cannot be, a direct, immediate tangible return to intellectual and spiritual effort. We may call people who excel in these forms of exertion, "Guardians" as the Greeks did, and endow them; or, as the modern world seems inclined to do, we may call them triflers or even loafers, and leave them if not actually to starve, yet to break their hearts in ineffectual strivings. We can always do and say what we like, that is the Englishman's cherished privilege; but it has not been given even to him to alter facts. So, it is still true of Wisdom that "the topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold," simply because Wisdom is intangible, while gold and its like can be weighed, divided, and handed round.

Then, again, in an era of widely diffused cleverness, Flecker was a man of original genius: and cleverness is not always comfortable with so different a quality.

There is a Victorian tale, not improbably apocryphal, of two elderly ladies witnessing from the stalls a presentation of *Antony and Cleopatra*. In the interval, one turned to the other observing, "Very interesting, my dear, but how unlike our own dear Queen!" —an allegory of the widespread desire to cut everybody to pattern. The pattern may be good or bad, but, too often, the desire springs from subtle tyranny. All sorts of people desired Flecker to correspond to their idea of a poet; whereas with a queer blend of modesty and determination, flashed across, under sufficient provocation, with vehement protestations of his own worth, Flecker drove steadily forward in his struggle to realise his own visions and dreams.

Unfortunately, to be left in peace just to be himself, a man must not only be, but must be recognised as being, a genius. Generally speaking, he is not so recognised till he is dead. The insoluble puzzle remains why, in a drab and monotonous civilisation, people should persist in looking their gift-horses in the mouth.

Flecker after receiving the traditional English training in the Classics, wandered away to the French Parnassians, finding them "uniquely attractive." He travelled on, among the modern Frenchmen, appreciating Samain's shy beauty, and Fort's exuberant universality; while all his literary life long Heredia, that subtle and finished artist, was his constant companion. Along with these, went an early liking for Sir Richard Burton and Fitzgerald, and in later years a wide rather than a concentrated study of Oriental poets. He read German, and, with special affection, Italian Poetry.

Yet, from boyhood on, and through all this omnivorous reading, he remained consistently himself.

Some of his College friends, even if their statements at the time seemed, to older people, extravagant, expected great things of him,

and, as events turned out, not unjustifiably. While Flecker was a very young man, Mr. Frank Savery sent him a copy of Maupassant's *Pierre et Jean*, writing with it—

> " That your work may be like this is the wish of one who believes in you and is also, and hopes always to be your affectionate friend and admirer."

This shows what a man who knew Flecker, with undergraduate intimacy and understanding and who also knew what literature is, hoped and expected, before Flecker had won fame.

Once more, let it be remembered that his capacity was creative rather than acquisitive. Very early, he beheld Beauty, rather than other men's presentations of beautiful things, and loved her. With all his temperamental distaste for the dishevelled thought and expression common in the first decade of the present century, helped by his classical training and Parnassian affinities, he, from the first, insisted on beauty both of content and form. One without the other did not satisfy him. Though he valued most highly Parnassian workmanship, he could also agree with Verhaeren the *Symboliste* :—

> " Le poète est par sa nature même un exalté. Forcément dès qu'il écrit, ses passions et ses idées se revêlent en une vie abondante, chaude, suprême : elles se haussent jusqu'à la grandeur, elles s'harmonisent en leur propre puissance, et atteignent ainsi la beauté."

Form without sense, or meaning conveyed in a rough unchiselled setting, repelled him.

It may be true, that once for a short time, Flecker somewhat over-emphasised workmanship. As the years passed, and calamity first threatened and then fell on him, his vision widened : and then, his care for formal beauty adjusted itself, until he wrote :—

> " It is Paul Fort who can show us what it is to be a poet : it simply means an enthusiasm for the world in every detail."

Thus from the chiselled, graved, and polished perfection of *Narcissus*, *Yasmin*, *Iskander*, *Santorin*, *Hyali*, he worked his gradual way, along a path set often with difficulty and disillusionment, with toil and rebuffs, till he found himself at last face to face with the sweep of Time, and the limitlessness of Space :—

I am emptied of all my dreams :
I only hear Earth turning, only see
Ether's long bankless streams,
And only know I should drown if you laid not your hand on me.

What he might have achieved, had he lived some years longer in a state of reasonably good health, who can presume to say? But those who even partially understand what he aimed at, who value what he actually compassed, may be content to leave him in that small company, who are, to borrow Francis Vielé-Griffin's lines—

Invulnérables au rire infâme,
Joyeux d'avoir vu la Beauté!

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